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Lifting the Veil on Global Sisters: Contesting Imperialist Models Of Feminism For Contemporary Iran

by

Nima Naghibi

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Stephen Slemon

Ali Behdad

Nasrin Rahimieh

Patricia Clements

Cressida Heyes

Cressida Heyes

Abstract

There is a long, and largely neglected, history of Western women's involvement in Persia from the mid-nineteenth century to the present time. British and American women travelled to the country variously as representatives of Christianity eager to spread the good word of the Bible, as "intrepid adventuresses" bravely exploring the exotic and alien land of Persia, and as feminists who went to Iran in the name of global sisterhood. The language of global, or universal, sisterhood was developed with particular vigour during the nineteenth century, and was articulated within a discursive framework of modern progress. It was through the discourse of sisterhood that elite Persian women of the late nineteenth century, and the state-sponsored Pahlavi feminists of the twentieth century, expressed solidarity with their Western counterparts.

The problem with the discourse of sisterhood remains, however, the inherent inequality between "sisters." Often using the veil as a marker of Persian women's backwardness, Western and (unveiled) elite Iranian women represented themselves as epitomical of modernity and progress, while the veiled Persian woman was made to embody subservient womanhood. By mobilizing the language of sisterhood, Western and Iranian women from the privileged classes positioned themselves as fully formed subjects against which less privileged Persian women were constructed as abject.

Feminism in Iran, much like its historical roots in the West, has been inextricable from the history of imperial expansion and class oppression, therefore

limiting its potential as an oppositional theory for social and political change. It is the confluence of the discourses of modernity and of global sisterhood, as well as the mobilization of the figure of the subjugated Persian woman, in the works of Western and state-sponsored Iranian (or Pahlavi) feminists that this dissertation explores. This project also examines contemporary representations of Iranian women by feminist film-makers currently active in the Islamic Republic. One of the predominant forms of cultural expression in Iran has become contemporary cinema, which reaches an international audience, and whose metaphoric and coded images have subversive implications for post-revolutionary feminist articulations.

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Introduction

"An imaginative Aunt who, for my ninth birthday, sent a copy of *The Arabian Nights* was, I suppose, the original cause of trouble." Thus begins Freya Stark's 1934 narrative of her travels in Persia, *The Valley of the Assassins*. This Orientalist evocation of *The Arabian Nights* is a common manoeuvre in the many texts written by British and American women who travelled to Persia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[1] Behind this evocation lies a consistent representation of Persia as exotic,

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[1] Throughout this thesis, I will on occasion use the name "Persia" and on others "Iran" for reasons of historical accuracy. In 1934, as part of his program to reinvent the nation as modern and to emphasize a break from previous dynasties, Reza Shah changed the name of the country from Persia to Iran. Some historians have suggested that Iran, derived from the word Aryan, appealed to the Shah because it echoed the suggestions of racial purity formulated by Nazi German ideology. Reza Shah's close ties to Germany were, in large part, due to his deep distrust of both Britain and Russia and their long history of imperialist intervention in Iran. But as Nikkie Keddie has stated, Reza Shah was certainly "not averse to Nazi phrases and methods, as they suited his dictatorial and nationalistic inclinations" (1981:110).

Some Iranian academics prefer to employ the term "Persia" in their works because of their perception of the racist roots of the word "Iran." The word Persia, on the other hand, is derived from the Greek, Persis, referring to the southwestern province of Parsa, or Fars (Morgan 1). According to Keddie, however, Reza Shah did not rename the country by calling it Iran; he was in fact proposing a return to the country's indigenous name:

> The word "Iran" is a cognate of "Aryan;" these words were used by that branch of the Indo-European peoples who migrated southeast before 1000 B.C., the Iranians staying in Iran and the Aryans going on to India. (Keddie 2)

In more recent years, Iranians have had other reasons to reject the name Iran. After the events of the 1979 revolution, and the establishment of an Islamic Republic, many Iranians in the West, particularly in North America, where there was heightened anti-Iranian sentiment during the 1980 American hostage crisis, chose to revert to the use of "Persia" as a way of dissociating themselves from the policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this thesis, I have chosen to refer to both Persia and Iran according to its official nomenclature in the historical record. I will speak of "Persia" in the pre-1930s period, accessible, and passive, and at the heart of this structure of representation one finds -- almost inevitably -- the figure of the exoticized, veiled, and silent Persian woman. This structure of representation, I believe, enabled British and American women writers to counterpose a figural category -- the subjugated female Other -- against a more recognizably domestic image of female subjectivity, and thus to occupy a male subject position of power in relation to Persian women. In my dissertation, I explore the ways in which "first-world" feminist empowerment, as represented in these narratives, depends upon a figural subjugation of Persian women. At the same time, I examine the ways in which Western women's representation of Persian women as abject is contested by Persian women's participation at significant junctures in Iranian political history. My thesis traces the ways in which Western women's structure of self-empowerment continues into contemporary Western and pre-revolutionary, state-sponsored Iranian feminist narratives about Persia and Iran, and examines what happens to this structure of representation when it is contested by post-revolutionary, indigenous Iranian feminists in their own narratives of self-representation.

There is a long, and largely neglected, history of Western women's involvement in Persia from the mid-nineteenth century to the present time. British and American women travelled to Persia variously as representatives of Christianity eager to spread the good word of the Bible, as "intrepid adventuresses" bravely exploring the exotic and alien land of Persia (usually in the company of a male colonial officer to whom they were

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and of "Iran" in the post-1930s.

related) and as feminists who went to Iran in the name of global sisterhood.

Although there are differences between the self-sacrificing missionary who claims to bring the light of Christ to a land of darkness, the intrepid, independent and spirited adventuress who travels simply because she has the privileged circumstances to indulge her "wanderlust," and the feminist subject who seeks to close ranks with her less fortunate sisters, this thesis attempts to explore the discursive similarities between the ways in which they position themselves against the Persian woman.[2] The Western woman, modelled on an Enlightenment figure of autonomous subjecthood, contrasts herself in each instance to the Persian woman, represented as the devalued other against which Western woman consolidates her self. Privileged Iranian women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also participated in the discursive subjugation of their working-class Persian counterparts. Elite Iranian women appropriated Western feminist representations of Persian women in order to distinguish themselves from the lower classes, and in order to insert themselves within the patriarchal nationalist discourses of the time. By positioning the Persian woman as the embodiment of abject and enslaved womanhood, Western and elite Iranian women represented themselves as epitomical of modernity and progress.

Despite the large body of Western women's writing on Persia and the Persian woman, there has been very little critical attention paid to these works. In 1991, Sara Mills argued that women's travel writings have been largely ignored in the field of colonial discourse analysis. Those who have studied women's travel texts are, she claims in *Discourses of Difference* (1991), women critics who have situated themselves and their critique within a celebratory feminist framework, representing women travellers as intrepid and eccentric feminists who dared to travel in spaces generally only accessible to men (4). There has been since Mills' contentious statement, a growing body of scholarly work on the politics of women's travel writing, including *Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* (1994), edited by A. Blunt and G. Rose, Kumari Jayawardena's *Western Women and South Asia During British Rule* (1995), Inderpal Grewal's *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel* (1996), Meyda Yegenoglu's *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a feminist reading of Orientalism* (1998), and Cheryl McEwan's *Gender, Geography and Empire: Victorian Women Travellers in West Africa* (2000).

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[2] The term, "wanderlust" peppers the narrative of Ella Constance Sykes in *Through Persia on a Side-Saddle* (1901), her first book on Persia.

Although Mills questions the absence of rigorous feminist critique of women's travel writing, she succumbs to the temptation to exonerate the Western woman traveller, simply by virtue of her gender, from her participation in the reproduction of the colonial order:

> Because of the way that discourses of femininity circulated within the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women travel writers were unable to adopt the imperialist voice with the ease with which male writers did. The writing they produced tended to be more tentative than male writing, less able to assert the 'truths' of British rule without qualification. Because of their oppressive socialisation and marginal position in relation

> to imperialism, despite their generally privileged class position, women writers tended to concentrate on descriptions of people as individuals, rather than on statements about the race as a whole. (Mills 3)

Despite Mills' claim that Western women writers avoided making "statements about the race as a whole," I would suggest, along with such feminists as Antoinette Burton, Inderpal Grewal, Kumari Jayawardena, Cheryl McEwan, and Meyda Yegenoglu, that Western women, in their capacity as missionaries, as "eccentric" or "intrepid" travellers, or as feminists, used their gender as a strategy of unique emplacement within the colonial project. McEwan has observed that:

> Many Victorians viewed lone women travelers as oddities, eccentric 'globetrotteresses' with little to contribute to scientific and geographical knowledge . . . Accounts of [women's] 'vagaries' add spice to already colourful biographies, but at the same time underestimate the contribution of women to British imperial culture and overlook the part they played in the production of imperial knowledges. (4,5)

As women, they had a mobility denied Western men; they could trangress the gendered boundaries of the public and the private so carefully observed in the East. Armed with a privileged access to the women's quarters, to the mothers of the Oriental races and nations, and thus to the "heart of empire," Western women in Persia gave themselves the authority to make sweeping statements about the "race" as a whole.[3] In 1894, Gertrude

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[3] In missionary and feminist writings of the nineteenth century, women's quarters in countries of the Middle East have been referred to as the "heart of Empire." It was

Bell published *Persian Pictures*, an account of her travels in Persia. At the end of a chapter describing her visit with three (veiled) women of the nobility, she writes, "We left them gazing after us from behind their canvas walls. Their prisoned existence seemed to us a poor mockery of life as we cantered homewards up the damp valley, the mountain air sending a cheerful warmth through our veins" (Bell 67). In 1910, Ella Sykes opined that "[t]he life of a Persian woman, taken as a whole, cannot be considered a happy one, and the victims of islam recognise that their fate is hard when they are brought into contact with European women" (Sykes 1910: 208). In February 1999, more than one hundred years after Bell's *Persian Pictures*, Elaine Sciolino published a feature article in *The New York Times* Travel section on her experiences touring Iran with a group of "intrepid, well-traveled and well-prepared"Americans (TR 9). The trip offended the feminist sensibilities of the women in the group, one of whom she quotes as saying: "Before I came here, I believed in women's liberation. Now I believe in women's domination" (TR 8). In each instance, from Bell's 1894 observations to Sciolino's 1999 adventures, Western women position themselves against Persian women, contrasting their own independence and liberation with the miserable, "prisoned existence" of their Persian counterparts.

Mills admits that women travel writers "cannot be said to speak outside of colonial discourse," but she believes that their relationship to "the dominant discourse is

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generally believed that the colonial project depended on the support (and the conversion) of women in the colonies as they were the carriers of culture and religion. Chapter One, "Enlightening the Other: Christian Sisters and Intrepid Adventuresses" will discuss this concept in further detail.

problematic because of its conflict with the discourses of 'femininity'" (63). Simon Gikandi describes Western women's discourses as ambivalent because of their ambiguous relationship to the colonial enterprise, resulting in the "complicity/resistance" dialectic which he explains as:

> a schema whose primary goal is to show how women saw empire as an opportunity for freedom and advancement but found it impossible, given their own subordinate positions in the domestic economy, to unconditionally valorize the imperial voice. (123)

I would like to suggest that despite their unequal relationship to men, and initially, to the colonial project, Western women argued successfully for their full and important participation in the colonies not despite, but indeed in substantial part *because* of their gender. They argued that, as women, they had unique access to the "harems" or women's quarters in the Orient. Since a country's level of progress was for them measured by the status of its women, Western women located themselves within a particular position of authority initially by declaring the backwardness of their Eastern sisters and then by setting themselves the task of civilizing their inferiors. In this way, Western women defined their own unique burden which they chose to bear in the civilizing project.[4] Western women could alter the masculinist tenor of colonial discourse by occupying a central position within the colonial project because of the mobility awarded them due to their gender.

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[4] Antoinette Burton calls this particular dilemma "the white woman's burden"-- also the title of her important essay published in *Western Women and Imperialism*, edited by Nupur Chudhuri and Margaret Strobel.

In Helen Barrett Montgomery's 1910 study of women's missionary work in the Orient, she forecasts dire predictions for Oriental women should Western women be prevented from ministering to their medical needs:[5]

> We cannot pursue the story of this chapter in the expanding life of women further than to note its bearing on foreign missions. These lion-hearted pioneers in the field of medicine were blazing a trail whose importance they little dreamed. If the contracted ideas of propriety held by the vast majority of men and women in the civilized world of that time had triumphed, one of the most powerful agencies in the Christian conquest of the world would have been wanting. Whether there were to be women physicians was a question of interest in America: but in Asia it was a question of life and death. The women of half the world were shut out from medical assistance unless they could receive it at the hands of women. So with God and nature leading them, the women pioneers

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[5] This volume, *Western Women in Eastern Lands*, was issued by *The Central Committee on The United Study of Missions*. The committee was formed at a special session for women at an ecumenical conference held in New York in May 1900. The Baptist, Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Protestant Episcopal, Dutch Reformed and Lutheran Boards each appointed a member to the committee, whose goal was to publish works on foreign missions, primarily written by and for women.

> While these studies were primarily for the use of women, they have all been along broad lines, not confined to woman's work nor unduly magnifying it. [*Western Women in Eastern Lands*], therefore, meets a real need, as there has never been an adequate presentation of this department of Foreign Missions. (xiii)

> pressed out into the untried path; hundreds of more timid souls followed them, and the protesting old world settled back grumbling to get used to the new situation. (119)

Montgomery's contrast between "old world" propriety and "new" world models of male and female roles emerges from a particular historical moment. Theories of social evolution, which became increasingly popular in the nineteenth century, supported the argument that women were biologically inferior to men. In this climate of increasing conservatism and rigid gender differences, "woman became a symbol of . . . nonmodern identity" (Felski 18). Rita Felski has traced the history of the "modern" and the contradictory significations of the term. She argues that the idea of the "modern" as expressed during the French Revolution enabled a subversive and revolutionary challenge to established social and political hierarchies (13). At the same time, she states, the concept of modernity is inextricably woven with the colonial enterprise. By denying what Johannes Fabian has termed "temporal coevalness" to the Oriental Other, the West can justify its presence in the East by claiming to bring educational, medical and technological progress to a less modern nation. The concept of the modern also excluded women, but women of the middle-class appropriated the idea of newness in order to posit the "New Woman" as the vanguard of modernity. According to Felski, in "the early twentieth century the figure of the New Woman was to become a resonant symbol of emancipation, whose modernity signaled not an endorsement of an existing present but rather a bold imagining of an alternative future" (Felski 14).

Montgomery's appeal to the "new situation" when describing the valiance of missionary women doctors evokes the figure of the 'New Woman.' She describes medical missionary women as 'lion-hearted pioneers' on the threshold of a new enterprise: that of converting Oriental women. She writes:

> The women of the Orient, shut in, illiterate, superstitious, are naturally the hardest to win. They do not want to learn, they resist the pain of new ideas. To one argument they are open. The woman who ministers to them in their suffering, who redeems the lives of their little ones, who fights for them the pestilence that walks in darkness, may say anything she pleases to them about her religion, and they will listen. (131-2)

Not only does Montgomery make a space for women in the traditionally patriarchal discourse of modernity, but she also forwards a strong argument in favour of including Western women as an integral part of the traditionally male colonial project.

Contrary to the conventional perception that the discourse of Victorian femininity was disenabling for Western women, Vron Ware has argued that the colonies offered a number of opportunities to British women in the nineteenth century:

> At a time when evolutionary theories defining women's physical and mental capabilities were beginning to pass into the realms of 'common sense,' the Empire provided both a physical and an ideological space in which the different meanings of femininity could be explored or contested. Corresponding ideas about racial or cultural difference provided a context for these conflicts to be played out in their full complexity, so that, for example, the Englishwoman abroad could be at once a many-faceted

> heroic figure: from an intrepid adventuress defying racial and sexual boundaries to heroic mother responsible for the preservation of the white 'race;' from the devoted missionary overseeing black souls to the guardian of white morals; from determined pioneer and companion to the white man to a vulnerable, defenceless piece of his property. (120)

Indeed, if the discourse of femininity hampered the mobility of Western women, as Mills and Gikandi suggest, then the discourses of feminism and of modernity enabled them to move outside of their scripted and restrictive lives in England and the United States.[6]

Leila Ahmed has argued that the language of feminism became an important rhetorical tool deployed by men and women in the nineteenth century in the service of the colonial project (151). In *Western Women in Eastern Lands*, Montgomery uses Lord Cromer's denunciations of Moslem women's lives to bolster her own argument for the presence of women missionaries in the colonies:

> It cannot be doubted that the seclusion of women exercises a baneful influence on Eastern society. The arguments on this subject are, indeed, so commonplace that it is needless to dwell upon them. It will be sufficient to say that seclusion, by confining the sphere of woman's interest to a very limited horizon, cramps the intellect and withers the mental development

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[6] In Janaki Nair's instructive essay on the representations of the Indian Zenana in British women's discourses, she writes:

> In 1881, *The Englishwoman's Review* had even suggested that the segregation of women in India was a useful "prejudice" since it provided Englishwomen doctors and lawyers an opportunity to exercise their newly won skills, an opportunity largely denied them in Britain. (24)

> of one-half of the population of Moslem countries. An Englishwoman asked an Egyptian lady how she passed her time. 'I sit on this sofa,' she answered, 'and when I am tired I cross over and sit on that.' (qtd. Montomery 80-1)

Cromer's indignation at Moslem women's lives of seclusion and oppression – as he represents them – did not arouse his sympathies for English women's feminist activities at home. In fact, as Ahmed points out, although Cromer was an outspoken critic of the practice of veiling in Egypt, he was a "founding member and sometime president of the Men's League for Opposing Women's Suffrage" in England (Ahmed 153). British patriarchs focused on certain practices in other cultures that they identified as oppressive such as the practice of sati in India, veiling in the Middle East, or foot-binding in China, and used the rhetoric of feminism to justify their colonial presence in the offending country:

> Even as the Victorian Male establishment devised theories to contest the claims of feminism, and derided and rejected the ideas of feminism and the notion of men's oppressing women with respect to itself, it captured the language of feminism and redirected it, in the service of colonialism, toward Other men and the cultures of Other men. (Ahmed 151)

Gayatri Spivak has, now famously, described this patriarchal colonial impulse to protect women from their native cultures as "white men saving brown women from brown men" (1988: 297). Western women also used the language of feminism, and of women's rights, in order to highlight the differences between their independent, capable selves and their subjugated colonial counterparts. Ahmed writes:

> Whether in the hands of patriarchal men or feminists, the ideas of Western feminism essentially functioned to morally justify the attack on native societies and to support the notion of the comprehensive superiority of Europe. Evidently, then, whatever the disagreements of feminism with white male domination within Western societies, outside their borders feminism turned from being the critic of the system of white male dominance to being its docile servant. Anthropology, it has often been said, served as a handmaid to colonialism. Perhaps it must also be said that feminism, or the ideas of feminism served as its other handmaid. (154-5)

Ware has acknowledged the dearth of Western feminist scholarship that attempts to engage with the historical, political, and social conditions that enabled the growth of "first wave" feminism by asserting that "feminist ideology and practice were shaped by the social, economic and political forces of imperialism to a far greater extent than has been acknowledged" (119). Although the missionary woman and the 'intrepid adventuress' did not necessarily see themselves as feminists, they believed, like the early feminists, in the importance of women's equal rights with men. They also believed that it was the moral duty of Western women to introduce the idea of women's rights to the Orient and they did so through the concept of sisterhood. Western women missionaries, travellers and feminists identified Eastern women as their 'sisters,' and drew on the Enlightenment idea of universal rights and equality.

Although universal or global sisterhood is commonly associated with the "second wave" of feminism which reached its peak during the 1970s, the concept of global sisterhood can in fact be traced back to nineteenth-century missionary women's discourse. As Susan Thorne has argued, the "missionary connection between British feminists and the empire helped to establish the imperial coordinates of Western feminism's conception of global sisterhood. Missionary tracts appealed explicitly to women's solidarity across 'racial' divides by condemning the patriarchal abuse of heathen women in the colonies" (52).

One significant difference between the rhetoric of 1970s global sisterhood and that of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries centers on the notion of oppression. In the 1970s, the official rhetoric of global sisterhood was one of the common oppression of women. Although nineteenth-century British and American women used the language of sisterhood to acknowledge women's oppression world-wide, they invariably used the Eastern woman as a symbol of women's "collective past" (Nair 16). Middle-class Victorian women were represented as the highest calibre of womanhood on the socio-evolutionary scale. According to Felski, middle-class women used evolutionary theories to their advantage by "frequently present[ing] themselves as an intellectual and political vanguard at the forefront of history. Within this scenario, women of other races and classes were often depicted as primitive and backward" (149). The image of the backward Eastern woman, who belongs to a more primitive era, served as a contrast to the more highly evolved figure of womanhood in the West and enabled Western women to place themselves in a leadership position vis-a-vis their Eastern sisters.[7] This hierachical model of sisterhood was embraced by privileged women in the Orient who, in turn, used class differences to place themselves at the forefront of the women's movements in their respective countries.

In *Our Moslem Sisters: A Cry of Need from Lands of Darkness* (1907), a collection of papers on Christian missions in Moslem countries presented at a 1906 conference in Cairo, Annie Van Sommer appealed to Presbyterian missionary women to bring salvation to women in "Moslem lands:"

> . . . we ask you to enter into a covenant of prayer with us, that we may not cease to intercede for our broken-hearted sisters, that they may be comforted, and for the captives of Satan, that they may be set free, that the prison gates may be opened for them so that the oil of joy may be given them for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.
>
> 'Life! life! eternal life!
> Jesus alone is the giver.
> Life! life! abundant life!
> Glory to Jesus for ever.'

---

[7] bell hooks makes a similar critique against 1970s global sisters in "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity Between Women." She believes that one of the main problems with the sisterhood of the second-wave feminist period was the insistence of white, bourgeois women that they lead the movement:

> Racist socialization teaches bourgeois white women to think they are necessarily more capable of leading masses of women than other groups of women. Time and time again, they have shown that they do not want to be part of the feminist movement - they want to lead it. (132)

> When this Life becomes theirs, Our Moslem Sisters *will be our own sisters in a new sense of the word*, and we shall see the evangelization of the Mohammedan home and of all Moslem lands. (298, emphasis mine)

The idea of sisterhood, as represented here, is predicated upon a hierarchical, pedagogical relationship between those sisters who know and those who passively await enlightenment. Van Sommer's claim that after conversion to Christianity, the women will become their sisters "in a new sense of the word" betrays a recognition that the sisterhood which she is currently advocating is predicated on an assumption of inequality.

The language of women's rights, and the idea of the universality of those rights, was developed with particular vigour during the nineteenth century, and was articulated within a discursive framework of modern progress and global sisterhood. The problem with the discourse of sisterhood, however, remains the inherent inequality between "sisters." This hierarchical relationship between women who know and those who require instruction continues to haunt contemporary Western and diasporic Iranian feminist discourses that celebrate the universal experience of all women. Bruce Robbins has argued convincingly that "defenses of universalism, like attacks on it, are increasingly a trivial pursuit" (166). He believes that there is no such thing as what he calls a "clean universalism" and that critiques of universalism that aim to include the particular only reproduce a new universalism in the place of an old one. Although I agree with Robbins' point about the futility of arguing about universal inclusiveness, I believe that Meyda Yegenoglu's argument in *Colonial fantasies* is an important one to consider here. She states that the universal sisterhood proclaimed by Western feminists since the nineteenth century is "a particular that masquerades as universal. But it should be emphasized that not any particular has the power to enforce itself as universal" (102).

Joan Scott has traced the history of feminism and that of universalism back to two conflicting notions of the individual in Enlightenment discourse. In "Universalism and the history of feminism," Scott describes the first definition of the individual as an "abstract prototype for the human"(2). This definition, according to Scott, was used in order to prove that there were certain universal and natural rights to which citizens of a nation were entitled. However, those who for reason of gender, race, or class did not fit the definition of the abstract human prototype were excluded from this system of supposed universal inclusion.

The second Enlightenment definition of the individual was that of a unique being, a distinct person who was defined (necessarily) in relation to an Other. Western women were excluded from the political rights of the citizen since they did not fit the definition of the human prototype and because they were the "Other" to the male individual. The universal definition of the individual - the "abstract prototype for the human"- was necessarily male and the definition of the individual as unique required, in the words of Gayatri Spivak, a "self-consolidating Other." By virtue of their Otherness to men, Western women were excluded from the political rights of the citizen.

Scott argues that the power of feminism lies in its subversive nature. By revealing the contradictions of Enlightenment definitions of the individual as both universal and unique, feminism challenged the ostensibly democratic foundation of French Republicanism. For this reason, Scott believes that feminism proved itself to be a dangerous and subversive political force. However, the subversiveness of Western feminism appears less convincing in light of its own attempts to insert women into the discourse of universalism. If European men used the idea of sexual difference to exclude women from the universal rights of man, then Western women used the idea of cultural difference in order to insert themselves into universalist discourse – and they did so by turning to the colonies. Yegenoglu writes:

> It is in the East that Western woman was able to become a full individual, which was the goal desired and promoted by the emerging modernist ideology. . . it is not far-fetched to argue that Western woman's recognition of herself as a subject was possible only outside national boundaries, in the encounter of a *sexually same yet culturally different other*." (107, emphasis hers)

In fact, early twentieth-century Western feminists were so successful at adopting the originally masculine Enlightenment discourse of individualism to achieve their political goals that it continues to permeate the language of global sisterhood.[8] It is the confluence of the discourses of modernity and of global sisterhood, as well as the mobilization of the figure of the subjugated Persian woman, in the works of Western and pre-revolutionary, state-sponsored Iranian, or what could be termed Pahlavi, feminists that I would like to explore in this thesis. I would also like to examine contemporary representations of Iranian women by feminist film-makers currently active in the Islamic Republic. Despite

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the large numbers of Iranian newspapers and magazines in circulation, Iran's stringent censorship codes exact punitive measures on the print media in an effort to muzzle dissenting voices. One of the predominant forms of cultural expression in Iran has become contemporary cinema, which reaches an international audience, and whose metaphoric and coded images have subversive implications for post-revolutionary feminist articulations.

This thesis will be divided into four chapters. The first chapter investigates Western women's construction of the Persian woman as the degraded Other; further, it gestures to a troubling of that formulation by Persian women's political activism. Chapters Two and Three examine the intersection of Western and Pahlavi feminist voices through the discourse of global sisterhood, and explores the ways in which both Western and Pahlavi feminists participate in occluding the dissenting voices of other Iranian feminists. The final chapter will act as a counterpoint to chapter One by focussing almost exclusively on an indigenous post-revolutionary Iranian feminism expressed through the popular medium of Iranian cinema.

Chapter One, "Enlightening the Other: Christian Sisters and Intrepid Adventuresses," examines the writings of Presbyterian and Anglican women missionaries who published accounts of their work in Persia (1899-1911), as well as Gertrude Bell's *Persian Pictures* (1894), and Ella Sykes' *Through Persia on a Side-Saddle* (1901), and *Persia and Its People* (1910). This chapter provides a historical background to the Western construction of the Persian woman as abject and the contestation of that construction by Persian women themselves. The argument will be structured around what historians have identified as the first "modern" period in Iran: that of the 1905-1911 Constitutional Revolution. I will be examining Western women's writings of that period in order to explore the ways in which the languages of modernity and sisterhood were mobilized to position the Persian woman in an unequal pedagogical relationship to Western women.

Chapter Two, "Global Sisters in Revolutionary Iran" offers a closer look at the discourse of global sisterhood as it manifested itself during the "second wave" of American and European feminism. It explores the ways in which 1970s global sisterhood was adapted to an Iranian context by considering the connections between the work of pre-revolutionary Iranian feminists within the state-sponsored *Women's Organization of Iran* and the involvement of prominent second wave feminists such as Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer, Kate Millett, Robin Morgan, Gloria Steinem and others in the Iranian feminist movement before and during the 1979 revolution. The active participation of Western feminists in the volatile Iranian feminist arena during the revolutionary period needs, as Burton points out, to be understood in light of "the historical roots of 'global sisterhood' . . . since the concept of international feminist solidarity was an ideal which Western European feminists were able to imagine partly through representations of non-Western women as compliant in their own salvation by their feminist 'sisters'" (1991: 70-71). This chapter will be structured around Paidar's description of the fourth period of Iranian modernity as "characterized by the state's double strategy of political repression and aggressive modernization," and will draw on Betty Friedan's recollections of her 1977 trip to Iran in "Coming out of the Veil" published in the *Ladies' Home Journal*, Germaine Greer's markedly different reflections on the same trip in "Women's Glib" published in *Vanity Fair* magazine, and Kate Millett's ventures into the 1979 Iranian feminist arena described in *Going to Iran* (1982) (Paidar 28). This chapter will also gesture to the ways in which the state-sponsored feminism of the Pahlavi period was complicitous with the imperialist discourse of global sisterhood in occluding the voices of other Iranian women.

One of the most obvious sites upon which the dominant discourses of Western feminism, as expressed through the language of global sisterhood, and Pahlavi feminism intersect is the subject of veiling. As Charlotte Weber, among many others, has argued, "the West has long evinced an enduring fascination with the harem and the veil, recurring tropes in orientalist literature that symbolize Muslim women's oppression and eroticism simultaneously" (125). The veil as the ultimate symbol of the degradation of Moslem, and in this case, Persian, women, continues to circulate in both popular and academic feminist narratives in the West. After travelling to Persia in the early decades of the twentieth century, Clara Colliver Rice described the pitiable lives of Persian women thus:

> Behind the veil out of doors, behind the curtain indoors, left out of every social function, public or private, in which men play any part, they are seldom educated, trusted, valued or respected. How can a country progress with its womanhood handicapped to this extent? (38)

Debates about veiling have often generated unequivocal positions on the oppressive, or alternatively, liberatory aspects of this article of clothing. While a significant number of Western women from the late nineteenth century to the present time have configured the veiled Persian woman as submerged beneath the suffocating folds of the *chador*, this chapter examines the complicity of many state-sponsored Iranian feminists and nationalists with the circulation of the image of the veil with backwardness. Taj Ol-Saltaneh, generally celebrated in Iranian academic circles as one of the early "modern" Iranian feminists declared: "[t]he veiling of women in this country has spawned and spread thousands upon thousands of corrupt and immoral tendencies" (292).

This third chapter, "Scopophilic Desires: Unveiling Iranian women," traces the intersection of Western and Iranian feminist discourses surrounding the familiar trope of the veil as oppressive. It attempts, furthermore, to move outside this binary by gesturing to the complexities of the practice of veiling within an Iranian context by grounding the argument in the historical moments of state-enforced unveiling (1936) and veiling (1983) and the participation of Western and Iranian women in these debates.

Chapter Four, "Female Homosociality and Resistance in Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema," grows out of the figure of the politically vigilant *hejabi* (veiled woman) discussed at the end of chapter three. By turning to contemporary Iranian cinema, with a particular focus on Tahmineh Milani's *Two Women* (1999), Ziba Mir-Hosseini's and Kim Longinotto's *Divorce Iranian-Style* (1998), and Rakhshan Bani-Etemad's *The May Lady* (1998), I argue that these movies provide a forum for the articulation of an indigenous Iranian feminism that has taken shape in the post-revolutionary era. The figure of the articulate and agential *hejabi* expresses herself and her desires through the concept of "female bonding." This concept of female bonding, I suggest, presents a viable and important challenge to the dated and imperialist model of hierarchical "global sisterhood" by refusing to offer false promises of equality. It suggests, rather, that by gendering the Foucaultian concept of "collective will," Iranian women can unite in their shared desire to redefine their subject status under the Islamic Republic of Iran and within patriarchal Iranian culture.

The figure of the post-revolutionary indigenous Iranian feminist dissociates herself from her earlier predecessors who were marked by the imperialism of global feminism. This chapter thus sees fit to focus on the agency of the indigenous female subject in contemporary Iran who is fighting, in the face of an oppressive system, for the recognition of her equal status to men in Iranian culture. Yegenoglu has argued:

> If the target of territorial imperialism is to de-territorialize and then re-territorialize the land of the native, the target of the imperial feminist project, directed towards unveiling, is *to alter the embodiment of the other woman by inscribing it according to different cultural, social, symbolic codes*. (112, emphasis hers)

Chapter Four aims, as does indeed this entire dissertation, to "seize. . . the value-coding" of the Persian woman as oppressed and re-inscribe her as an active agent in the redefinition of her own subjectivity as a politically vigilant feminist within an anti-feminist culture and an anti-feminist state (Spivak 1990: 228).

Chapter One

Enlightening the Other: Christian Sisters and Intrepid Adventuresses

This chapter examines one aspect of Western women's investment in Persia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the involvement of American and British women during the 1905-1911 Constitutional Revolution and the period before it. Historians interested in locating a "modern" moment in Iran have argued that Iranian modernity was born out of the ideas leading to the Constitutional Revolution. Parvin Paidar has remarked that the discourse of Iranian modernity was mutable, and that it went through four distinct phases in Iran; the Constitutional Revolution, she suggests, is the first of these four phases (27). According to Paidar, the idea of the modern emerged in the late nineteenth century, and was influenced by Western models of modernity, but by the late 1970s, it had developed into "an anti-Western political discourse" (29).

I would like to explore here the ways in which the discourses of modernity and of sisterhood intersect to position the Persian woman as the subjugated and passive other to the modern (Western) feminist subject. I will attempt to trace the shared desire, in the writings of Presbyterian and Anglican missionaries, and independent travellers Gertrude Bell and Ella Constance Sykes, for a particular figuration of the Persian woman as passive through the displacement of a more agential image. This glance at the historical roots of the politics of sisterhood is important to understanding the ramifications of its later manifestations in second wave and Pahlavi feminist discourses. By tracing the anxieties that surface in these texts in response to the (active) presence of the Persian woman, I hope to [re]read the Persian woman as an agential subject during the Constitutional Revolution. Before elaborating upon the similar representative strategies deployed by these different groups of Western women in their texts about their Persian counterparts, a contextualization of their varied positions, and a brief summary of this period in Iranian history is in order.

Although Persia was never a formal colony of a European power, it was subjected to indirect political and economic rule for centuries. Because of its strategic geographical location, neighbouring such countries as Afghanistan, India, and Russia, and because of its oil-rich territories, Iran figured as an object of desire for England and Russia, and later for the United States. Beginning in the 1850s, Iran became a battleground for European powers, mainly Russia and England, competing against each other for economic concessions (Keddie 58). The corrupt practices of the Qajar regime ensured the economic colonization of the country, and profits from European concessions often went directly into the royal purse while the rest of the country suffered the erosion of the country's resources.[9]

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[9] According to such historians as Nikkie Keddie and Parvin Paidar, the most significant concession in laying the foundation for the 1905-1911 Constitutional Revolution was the Tobacco Concession of 1890 (Keddie 66, Paidar 50). In 1890, Nasser E-Din Shah awarded a complete monopoly on the production, sale, and export of tobacco to a British entrepreneur. News of this concession sparked widespread protests and riots as tobacco was a product "widely grown in Iran, and profiting many landholders, shopkeepers, and exporters" (Keddie 66). By December 1891, there was a nationwide boycott on the sale and use of tobacco in Iran; this boycott was strictly observed -- even and especially by the Shah's wives amongst whom smoking was very popular at that time. In 1892, the Shah finally conceded defeat and cancelled the concession. Since the Russians had been strongly in support of the tobacco boycott, theirs became a more influential presence in Persia during and after the protests.

On 31 August 1907, the British and Russian governments signed the infamous Anglo-Russian treaty which proposed to divide Iran into three sections: northern and central Iran would fall under Russian influence, southeastern Iran under British influence and the area in between was declared the neutral zone.[10] This agreement was drawn up between the two countries without the consent of the Iranian government; indeed, "[t]he Iranians were neither consulted on the agreement nor informed of the terms when it was signed" (Keddie 75).

It was during this volatile period of predominantly British and Russian competition for economic control of Iran, that British and American missionaries established themselves in the country. The two principal groups of missionaries in Persia were the British Anglicans of the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) and the American Presbyterians from the Board of Foreign Missions. The C.M.S. became increasingly

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Nasser E-Din Shah was assassinated in 1896 and his son Mozaffar E-Din Shah replaced him as the country's monarch. In 1900 and 1902, the government borrowed two exorbitant sums from the Russian government:

> The first loan required Iran to pay off British debts and not to incur any other debts without Russian consent, and the second included major economic concessions. The Russians also insisted on a new customs treaty, signed in 1902, which gave key Russian goods lower rates than the already low 5 percent ad valorem. The income gained from the loans and from customs reform went largely for three extravagantly expensive trips to Europe that the Shah and his entourage took between 1900 and 1905. (Keddie 70-1)

Expanding Russian influence in the country, increasing economic devastation, and arbitrary rule of government contributed to an escalating resentment amongst the populace that eventually led to the Constitutional Revolution.

[10] Ironically, this "neutral" zone was in southwestern Persia, an area, it was later discovered, rich in oil. Subsequently, this area was controlled by the British government under the aegis of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC).

active in the country through the work of Robert Bruce, who settled in Persia in 1869, and later through the work of Reverend E.F. Hoernle, who went to Persia in 1879, and was also "a medical man" (Vander Werff 165).[11] It was in 1875, six years after Bruce's arrival, that the Church Missionary Society established itself in Persia, and by the late nineteenth century the C.M.S. had a significant number of missionaries working in the country. According to James Addison, "before 1900 the C.M.S. had six clergy on its staff and had opened stations with either hospitals or dispensaries at Kerman, Yezd, and Shiraz" (181).

The American Presbyterians became actively involved in Persia in the 1870s. In 1871, The Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions (PBFM) assumed responsibility for the Persian Mission from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (Zirinsky 1994: 187). Shortly thereafter, the PBFM started foreign missions in Tehran (1872), Tabriz (1873), Hamadan (1880), Rasht (1906), Qazvin (1906), Kermanshah (1910), and Mashad (1911) (Zirinsky 1994: 187).

Enlightening the Other: Christian Sisters in Persia

According to Kumari Jayawardena, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, "Christianity had a dual role--conversion and modernization" (22). While evangelical Christians encouraged and promoted individual conversion, they also believed in creating the domestic conditions that would enable a life of continuing faith (Davidoff and Hall 183). In *Persian Women and Their Creed* (1899), C.M.S. missionary Mary Bird writes:

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[11] Robert Bruce was not the first Anglican missionary in Iran. He was preceded by Henry Martyn who went to Persia in 1811 after five years of work as a translator and an evangelist in India. Martyn spent ten months in Shiraz revising a translated version of the New Testament into Persian. During that time, he debated the virtues of Protestant Christianity with the Moslems who came to see him, but his main goal was to leave behind literary works that could be used as tools in the evangelical project (Addison 179).

> [T]here is no word for home in the Persian language, because it has not been required; the Moslems have none of the associations and tender memories which that word awakens in us. (22)

The dismissal of the idea of a Persian home-life discloses Bird's attempt to justify the spread of Christian domestic ideology. The rise of evangelicalism in England at the end of the eighteenth century was, according to Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, a response to the French Revolution and to what the middle-classes perceived to be a crisis in English society (73):

> The nation, they believed, was suffering from moral degeneracy. Events in France were a warning of what was to come if individuals did not inspire a revolution in the 'manners and morals' of the nation, a transformation which must begin with individual salvation. (Davidoff and Hall 82)

Evangelicals placed a high value on the conversion experience and the family became an important site of individual spiritual growth. By the nineteenth century, the evangelical drive was displaced by a greater focus on the family as the locus of spiritual and moral development. Indeed, Christian domestic ideology, which promoted the gendered realm of the family as crucial to the moral and spiritual development of individuals, played a leading role in nineteenth-century evangelical missionary projects.

In this period of active missionary work, Christianity was seen as embodying superior cultural and religious values and the "backwardness" or "primitiveness" of Moslem cultures--and of Moslem men's treatment of women--was attributed to the false beliefs propagated by the unenlightened religion of Islam. Through the light of Christianity, it was believed, Moslems would recognize their degraded status and reject Islam "which rises as a stone wall to resist every real true ideal" (qtd. Van Sommer 1911:37). Bird, who worked in Persia from 1891-1904, paints a picture of the dismal life that Persian women lead under the "false prophet Mohammad" (2). Before she begins a point-by-point refutation of "the five points of the Moslem faith, which every true believer must accept," she writes:

> You know Mohammedans have as the symbol of their faith the crescent moon. A truer one could not have been found, for, like the crescent, the Moslem religion has but a little light and much shadow, and its light, like that of its symbol, is a reflected one borrowed from the Jewish and Christian religions. (5)

Bird's representation of Islam as a religion of darkness repositions her argument within Enlightenment discourse and "the scopic regime of modernity" which valorizes the visual and "refuses to tolerate areas of darkness" (Yegenoglu 12, 40). The association of Christianity with the Enlightenment, with reason and with progress is set against Islam as its anithetical Other, steeped, in the language of nineteenth-century missionaries in Persia, in darkness and ignorance.

Jayawardena has argued that it is difficult to read the presence – and, I would add, the language – of the Christian missionary in the Orient outside of the project of colonial expansion (24-5). Given the political history of Persia in the nineteenth century, it is no accident that in 1890, Reverend James Bassett refers to "[t]he *occupation* of Eastern Persia by resident American missionaries" when describing the establishment of the first Presbyterian mission in Tehran (74, emphasis mine). Michael Zirinsky has suggested that twentieth-century Iranian suspicions of the United States as a successor to British imperialism can be traced back to the early presence of the missionaries (1994: 187). Indeed, the 1895 Anglo-American agreement to partition the mission field resembles, rather disconcertingly, the Anglo-Russian Treaty of 1907 as it was agreed that "the Presbyterians confin[e] their work to northern Iran, leaving the south to the Anglican Church Missionary Society" (Zirinsky 1994: 187).

Foreign missions were initially a predominantly male enterprise, but as Jane Haggis writes, by the late nineteenth century, female missionaries significantly outnumbered their male counterparts:

> Though missionary work was originally conceived of as purely a male endeavour, by 1899 it was estimated that women missionaries outnumbered men in the 'foreign field' by over a thousand. This numerical ascendancy reflected the recruitment of single women as missionaries by the major missionary societies during the last three decades of the country. (Haggis 51)

The mission fields in Persia were no exception to this rule. In his work on Presbyterians in Persia, Zirinsky writes that most of the missionaries were women:

> As in other mission fields, some two-thirds of the Presbyterian missionaries in Iran were women . . . Over half of the mission women went to Iran unmarried. A few wed while on the field, but the mission establishment discouraged this practice. . . Missionary service was one of the few careers open to unmarried women, and in some respects it offered more freedom and opportunity than did those few choices open to them in America. (1992:175)

British and American women missionaries who went to work in Persia claimed that their goal was to work with Persian women, and their reasons for this, according to Zirinsky were two-fold:

> In the first place, the missionaries believed that all women were sisters, and they acted on the principle that sisters should help sisters. In the second place, male missionaries could work only with Iranian men outside of their homes. Although Iranian women and their families' private quarters were forbidden to unrelated men, women could gain access to them. Hence, women's work for women theoretically opened more than half of the population to the mission. (Zirinsky 1994: 191)

These two reasons, that of universal sisterhood and of Western women's unique access to what they called the "harems" of the East, resonate throughout the writings of missionary women and women travellers. It is this rhetoric of universality that permeates 1970s Western and Pahlavi feminist discourses, enabling them to adopt a position of superiority, similar to that assumed by early missionaries, in relation to the unenlightened Persian woman.

According to Jayawardena, women missionaries were genuinely dedicated to notions of social justice and social reform although their commitment to women's rights was articulated through notions of Western progress and enlightenment (23). The concepts of women's rights and social justice through an embrace of Christianity were, she argues, inextricably linked to the imperializing mission at the time:

> [During the nineteenth century], in the United States and Europe, a network of Christian women emerged proclaiming "global sisterhood" and venturing out of their homes into the male world of work, travel and adventure in the name of the "noble cause" to serve God and improve the condition of women. The main concern of the women missionaries was the amelioration of the lives of colonized women. But in the "Age of Empire," Christianity was linked with imperialist conquest and capitalist expansion, and the main current of missionary activity became identified with colonial rule. (24-5)

The women's quarters in Persia provided American and British women with a legitimate reason for travelling to the country and educating Persian women in matters of religion, health, and schooling. The fact that women's living quarters were located in the *andaroon*, the inner space of the home, and thus forbidden to men, enabled Western women to formulate a convincing argument in favour of their active participation in the traditionally male colonial enterprise. Western women could travel to the East not just as companions to male colonizers, but as colonizers in their own right. The foreign missions provided British and American women with one means of achieving this goal.

Many women missionaries played instrumental roles in forming women's groups and establishing girls' schools and orphanages in "Oriental" countries. Some of these women "pioneered female medical education. Thus a large part of the work in the two crucial areas of education and health were undertaken by foreign women" (Jayawardena 26). Although Jayawardena focuses on the work that British missionary women accomplished in India, the same efforts were made in Persia for Persian women. The Presbyterian missionaries established hospitals and schools in northern Iran, and introduced modern medicine and a formal system of education to the country (Zirinsky 1992: 174). Mary Bird, who was not a trained medical doctor "opened a clinic in Isphahan to dispense medicine, Gospel, prayer and hymn in equal measure" (Vander Werff 166). Yet, as Mary Taylor Huber and Nancy C. Lutkehaus have argued:

> [r]eligious causes enabled many Western women to go overseas, and women missionaries helped provide many subject women with access to education and opportunities they would not otherwise have enjoyed. Yet neither of these liberating, enlightening moves was without deep shadows, and their intersection, especially, created problems whose implications are just now being explored (7-8).

Missionary women in Persia articulate their concerns for the lives of Persian women through their belief that the practice of Islam and the concept of social justice are incommensurate. According to one Presbyterian missionary, "[t]he one fact of educating and emancipating woman, it would seem, must be a great blow to the whole doctrine of

Islam" (Van Sommer 1911: 37). They claimed that through religious conversion, they would educate and enlighten the mothers of the nation, the women who were responsible for the future of the race. In 1906, the American Presbyterian Society sponsored a conference in Cairo on Christian missions. The papers on Moslem women were published separately under a volume entitled, *Our Moslem Sisters: A Cry of Need from Lands of Darkness Interpreted by Those Who Heard It* (1907). In the first chapter, "Our Moslem Sisters," one of the editors of the volume, Annie Van Sommer writes:

> 'We must concentrate attention upon the mothers, for what the mothers are, the children will be.' These words, spoken recently by a British statesman, are but the thoughts of many who have tried to save the children. And in looking at the millions of Moslems in the world to-day, and wondering why they are still as they were a thousand years ago, rather drifting backward than advancing, we turn to their women and find the cause. Mohammedan law, custom, and the example of their founder place woman on a level with beasts of burden and no nation rises above the level of its women. (15)

By identifying women as the singular reason for the backwardness of "the Moslem world," Van Sommer rhetorically accomplishes several things: first, she participates in what Johannes Fabian has called the "denial of coevalness" to the Other of colonial discourse. This gesture of denial is "a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse" (Fabian 31). Second, by denying temporal coevalness to the

Oriental woman/Other, Van Sommer positions Western woman as a more highly evolved model of womanhood to which women of other races and classes must aspire. Third, by locating the "problem" of the Moslem world with Moslem women, she advances Western women's argument for the importance of their presence in the East. Identifying a feminized domestic space as the locus of the problem enables Western women to remain in a traditionally female space, that of the home, albeit in the Orient, thus appeasing members of the patriarchal colonial order. Inderpal Grewal has argued that "'[h]ome' is a crucial category within European travel because it is the space of return and of consolidation of the Self enabled by the encounter with the 'Other'"(6). The home functions in similar ways in the Orient as the Western woman's encounter with the Persian woman in the *andarun*, or women's quarters, serves as a means of self-consolidation; the life of the Persian woman is represented as all that a Western woman's is not.

The co-editors of *Our Moslem Sisters*, Reverend Samuel Marinus Zwemer and Annie Van Sommer, decry the sad state of the Moslem world, but in particular of Moslem women. In the introduction, Zwemer writes:

> This book with its sad, reiterated story of wrong and oppression is an indictment and an appeal. It is an indictment of the system which produces results so pitiful. It is an appeal to Christian womanhood to right these wrongs and enlighten this darkness by sacrifice and service. (5)

He then reproduces in his introduction the "Women's Appeal" written and presented at Cairo by a group of missionary women:

> We, the women missionaries, assembled at the Cairo Conference, would send this appeal on behalf of the women of Moslem lands to all the women's missionary boards and committees of Great Britain, American, Canada, France, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Holland, Australia, and New Zealand . . . The number of Moslem *women* is so vast–not less than one hundred million– that any adequate effort to meet the need must be on a scale far wider than has ever yet been attempted. (8,9, emphasis his)

In her chapter, "Our Moslem Sisters," Van Sommer urges Christian women in the West to heed the call of Christ in the Orient and to help their less fortunate sisters who are suffering under the weight of ignorance:

> You cannot know how great the need unless you are told; you will never go and find them until you hear their cry. And they will never cry for themselves, for they are down under the yoke of centuries of oppression, and their hearts have no hope or knowledge of anything better. And so to-day, we want to make our voices heard for them. We want to tell you, our sisters at home, in words so plain that you can never again say: 'Behold, we knew it not.' (16)

Moslem women are presumably so much submerged in darkness that they cannot recognize their own wretchedness, and it is incumbent upon their Western sisters to come to their aid. Even male missionaries urged the presence of the Western woman in the Orient. In *Persian Women: A Sketch of Woman's Life From The Cradle To The Grave,* *And Missionary Work Among Them, With Illustrations* (1898), Reverend Isaac Malek Yonan declares:

> The Christian apologetes need no longer spend their valuable time and fertile brains in vindicating Christianity. The treatment of women is in itself, sufficient proof of its superiority over any other system. The uncontrovertible facts of history and the strong testimony of experience show clearly that one of the distinguishing features of the so-called moral and philosophic religions of the world is the slavery and degradation of the female sex. (129)

If there is any doubt regarding which country is most in darkness and most in need of the light of Christ, Van Sommer tells us that "[a]lthough the voices in [*Our Moslem Sisters*] sound from many lands: Egypt, Tunis, Algiers, Morocco, Hausa Land, East Africa, Arabia, Palestine, Syria, Turkey, Bulgaria, Persia, India, one story is told and one cry heard everywhere" (17).

As Antoinette Burton, Jane Haggis, Kumari Jayawardena, and others have documented, the concept of sisterhood is inextricably linked with the feminization of missionary work. Haggis writes that women missionaries significantly outnumbered male missionaries by the late nineteenth-century (51). Jayawardena has observed that the rhetoric of global sisterhood was mobilized by American and European Christian missionaries as they proclaimed their commitment to improving the unenviable lot of their Eastern sisters (24). However, missionary work was not an entirely philanthropic endeavour, since the colonies presented professional opportunities otherwise not available to British and American women.[12] Furthermore, it was not just the missionaries who deployed the term "global sisterhood" in order to justify their participation in the (traditionally male) colonial and imperial project. In *Burdens of History*, Burton writes: "sisterhood was the watchword of women's suffrage in Britain in much the same way it was in other discourses about female social reform" (172).

According to Burton, it was the internationalism of the suffrage movement in Britain and in the United States that was emphasized in the pre-World War One period. Such organizations as the *International Woman Suffrage Alliance* (IWSA) created in 1904 held biennial conferences in order to discuss women's suffrage worldwide.[13] At the 1926 conference in Paris, the organization decided to broaden its scope and renamed itself the *International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship* (Schreiber 37). Burton, however, has pointed to the disingenuousness of the organization's claim to "internationalism," as IWSA conferences were usually held in European capitals and the organization was made up primarily of Western, particularly European members. She remarks: "[h]aving typed the Eastern woman as silent and impassive, suffragists were willing to speak for her in the name of universal womanhood" (Burton 1994: 195).

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[12] Huber and Lutkehaus write:

> The movement of missionary and other professional women into the colonies cannot be separated from the entry of middle-class women into philanthropy and the professions that took place at the same time. Women needed the colonies, which provided opportunities for professional service rarely available at home, and the colonies needed professional women to make good the humanitarian commitments by which imperial expansion in the late nineteenth century was increasingly justified. By attributing to women virtues crucial to social improvement, Victorian ideology enabled them to be cast in a special role as civilizers. In turn, women's movements for access to education and the professions at home were increasingly justified in imperial terms. (9)

[13] According to Adele Schreiber and Margaret Mathieson's history of the IWSA in *Journey Towards Freedom*, the organization held biennial meetings until WWI. After the war, the meetings were held triennially.

Secular European feminists used the "degraded" status of their "Oriental" sisters as a yard-stick with which to measure their own social and political advancement. The time-consciousness of fin-de-siècle culture, argues Rita Felski, inspired the sense of an ending coupled with an exhilarating sense of a new beginning (146). Western feminists' embrace of a "modern time awareness . . . affirmed a sense of history as chronological development and as embodying a linear, irreversible flow of time" (Felski 147). The middle-class members of the feminist movement located themselves at a more advanced stage along the axis of time in relation to women of the working classes and to women of other races and nations (149). Thus British middle-class feminists did not challenge the modern discourse of evolution and progress; rather, they used it to their own advantage. They argued that women were more highly evolved than men and that their roles as progenitors of the new white race placed them in an exalted position as the mothers of progress and of evolution (Felski 155, 161). Unsurprisingly, this feminist narrative of evolution could only be secured by holding up "other" women as examples of a "retarded development" (Felski 155). Burton traces the mobilization of the discourse of motherhood with discourses of evolution and progress to Victorian feminists whom she describes in the following manner:

> [a] strong sense of female superiority combined readily with other assumptions of imperial supremacy to make British feminists conceive of

> "the Anglo-Saxon woman" as the savior of her race, not to mention as the highest female type (138).

Many middle-class feminists in Britain benefitted from the imperialist project and mobilized the discourse of evolution in order to claim, as Felski has argued, "the public sphere as both a symbolic and a material space for women" (151). Burton makes a similar argument in "The White Woman's Burden" by claiming that many middle-class British feminists deliberately cultivated the civilizing responsibility as their own modern, womanly, and largely secular burden because it affirmed an emancipated role for them in the imperial nation-state (1992: 139). However, not all middle-class British women with interests in Persia aligned themselves with the feminist project, although they were closely affiliated with the imperializing mission.

Gertrude Bell and Ella Constance Sykes: Intrepid Adventuresses

Gertrude Bell and Ella Constance Sykes reaped the advantages of travelling in the colonies, without specifically positioning themselves within the feminist discourses of the period. Both were members of the privileged classes (Bell was a member of the aristocracy, and Sykes was comfortably middle-class); both were single women with the means and the opportunity to travel. Although Sykes does mention the "plight"of Persian women in her writings, and contrasts the situation of Persian women to that of their British counterparts, she avoids an explicit alignment with the suffragists. Instead, she embraces the role of the "determined . . . companion to the white man" whose affiliation with the British colonial administration takes him to Persia (Ware 120). Gertrude Bell, on the other hand, was an outspoken and active member of the *Women's Anti-Suffrage*

League; indeed, she was made honorary secretary of the organization (Wallach 82). Janet Wallach, author of the encomiastic biography, *Desert Queen: The Extraordinary Life of Gertrude Bell. Adventurer, Adviser to Kings, Ally of Lawrence of Arabia* (1996), explains Bell's anti-suffrage position thus:

> Gertrude saw herself as the equal of any man, but most women, she was firmly convinced, were not. Their votes would certainly be questionable; they could even prove to be dangerous. Like her mother Florence, or her father Hugh, or their friends Lord Curzon, Lord Cromer and Lord Robert Cecil, Gertrude argued that the female role was fundamentally different from that of the male: women were meant to rear children; men were meant to run the country. Furthermore, they all believed, only men had the sound judgment to rule the colonies, to determine foreign policy and to decide matters of the constitution; therefore, only men should have the right to cast a ballot. Rare was the woman knowledgeable enough to make a contribution to the affairs of state. Yet even as she promoted the agenda of the Anti-Suffrage League, Gertrude worked on her book about Byzantine Anatolia and yearned to penetrate the mysterious regions of the Arabian desert. (83)

Wallach paints a portrait of Bell as an intrepid, independent, and contradictory figure who, despite her anti-feminist activism, remains a model of feminist strength and spiritedness. Bell undertook a number of voyages to and through the Orient on her own and eventually won much fame and admiration for her diplomatic work in Iraq. But

Bell's first trip to the Orient was chaperoned. In May of 1892, Bell accompanied her aunt, Mary Lascelles, to visit her uncle Frank Lascelles, who was British minister in Persia at that time. She stayed in Persia until October of that year, and upon her return to England wrote *Persian Pictures*, published in 1894.

Almost two years after Bell's trip, Ella Sykes made the first of two visits to Persia as a companion to her brother, Sir Percy Molesworth Sykes, a British colonial administrator. Although she accompanied her brother on both trips to Persia, Sykes did travel on her own in the presumably "safer" colony of Canada.[14] Sykes' first book, *Through Persia on a Side-Saddle* (1898), describes her and her brother's travels through Persia from October 1894 to March 1897. *Persia and its People*, published in 1910, after their second trip to Persia, discloses a more authoritative tone and serious agenda that, I believe, makes a case for the presence of the British in the East.[15]

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[14] In 1911, on behalf of *The Colonial Intelligence League for Educated Women*, Sykes went to Canada disguised as a woman seeking employment as a "home-help" (Christianson 173). In the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Scott Christianson explains that a "home-help" was "a domestic servant for middle-class housewives . . . Unlike servants in the structured English 'upstairs-downstairs' system, the home-help had an ambiguous status; she was a member of the family, yet without quite being so – and was less a professional, in terms of duties performed and remuneration, than her English counterpart" (174). *The Colonial Intelligence League* was interested in investigating employment opportunities in the colonies for the educated and single British woman. According to Christianson, Sykes' book on Canada "offers the kind of 'keen' descriptions of scenery and places she delivered in *Through Persia on a Side-Saddle*. She also displays the same condescending sympathy for Canadian women less fortunate than herself that she showed toward Persian women" (174). He describes her charade as ridiculous and condescending:

> It is also colonialist: a daughter of the empire goes to the Dominion to discover how it may be exploited to solve England's problem of rampant unemployment of single women. Sykes' straightforward narrative lays bare the workings of imperialism – its hierarchy, its exploitation of its own working-class people and its colonies, even its exploitation of upper-class women, such as herself, drafted to "do their bit" for colonization. (174)

Although there are notable similarities between Bell's and Sykes' travel narratives, one of the significant difference between them is that Sykes offers a very gendered account of travel in *Through Persia on a Side-Saddle*. Indeed, Sykes foregrounds her gender by her choice of the book's title and throughout her narrative; in the preface, she writes:

> This book has no pretensions to be either historical, scientific or political, being merely the record of a very happy period of my existence which I have, in a way, re-lived by writing about it. My information, however, may claim to be correct as far as it goes, my brother, Major Sykes, who has travelled for several years in Persia on Government service, having revised my manuscript. As I believe that I am the first European woman who has visited Kerman and Persian Baluchistan, my experiences may

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[15] After her first trip to Persia, Sykes established herself as an unofficial authority on the subject. In addition to *Through Persia on a Side-Saddle*, and *Persia and Its People*, she published *The Story-Book of the Shah; or, Legends of Old Persia* (London: Macqueen, 1901). The late nineteenth and early twentieth century period seems to have been the "honeymoon" period of her relationship with the country. She wrote and presented papers on Persian folklore, but after the publication of *Persia and Its People*, and during the time of the Constitutional Revolution, Sykes hardened her position on Persia. The country was no longer the romantic and exotic locale which provided her with quaint anecdotes to relate; rather, it became a hopelessly backward and primitive country with a barbarous religion responsible for the imprisonment of the nation's women. Her paper at the *National Geographic Society* in October of 1910, "A Talk About Persia and Its Women," is a condensed version of *Persia and Its People* in which she reiterates one of her favourite statements: "From the moment of his entrance into the world, throughout his entire life and even in the hereafter, the Persian man has decidedly the best of everything and the woman the worst" (853).

> perhaps interest other women who feel the 'Wanderlust' but are unable to gratify their longing for adventure." (vii)

While she disavows any claim to political or historical expertise, Sykes establishes the authenticity of her narrative by invoking a figure of male colonial authority, her brother Sir Percy Sykes, who "knows" Persia as a British colonial officer. Percy Sykes is most famous for organizing, in 1916, the South Persia Rifles in order to fight encroaching Turkish and German armies into southern Persia during World War I (Keddie 80).[16] By gesturing to her brother's colonial position, Ella Sykes substantiates her travel narrative through her kinship with a respected figure of colonial officialdom. Having in this manner established her credibility, she joins the clamour of voices competing for recognition as the original traveller to the Orient: she purports to be the first European woman to visit Kerman and Baluchistan. Sykes directs her narrative to (women) armchair travellers, presumably more timid than she, "who feel the 'Wanderlust' but are unable to gratify their longing for adventure" (vii).

Sykes' gender does not exclude her from her participation in the colonial enterprise. In fact, her narrative belongs to a body of work by Western women travellers who used the Orient –and Oriental women – as a way of asserting their own independence and mobility as Englishwomen (Grewal 66). Indeed, "[m]ost of the 'pioneering' women (as the women travelers were often called) were supportive of the imperialist project'" (Grewal 67). They saw themselves, Grewal writes:

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[16] Iran declared neutrality during World War I, but because of its strategic geographical location, it became a battleground for English, German, Russian and Turkish forces. The Germans capitalized on Iranians' distrust of England and Russia, and they organized a tribal revolt against the British in the South. Nikkie Keddie states that even before the war, the British coveted control of the area declared neutral in the 1907 Anglo-Russian agreement. This putative neutral zone, the British discovered in 1909, was rich in oil, so when war broke out, "England promised Russia postwar control of Istanbul and the Straits in return for British rule in most of Iran's neutral zone, and a secret treaty for this was signed in March 1915" (Keddie 79).

> as part of a 'civilizing' nation, for that could imply a nation that would not subjugate or exploit its own people. Being part of the empire also gave them a sense of racial superiority that enabled them to feel their own worth and equality with men. (66)

Thus, while Sir Percy Sykes conducted his official duties as a colonial administrator in Persia, his sister occupied herself with the more domestic aspect of colonialism. In a chapter entitled, "Housekeeping at Kerman," Sykes details the exhausting task of setting up an English home in a primitive land amongst uncivilized people. Her main complaint is with the servants:

> We found our Persian servants, from highest to lowest, afflicted with an incurable laziness, and although we had over a dozen men to minister to our various wants, yet three or four good English servants would have done all the work they did and a great deal more besides. (81)

While her brother was busy managing the affairs of the country and civilizing the Persian population, Ella Sykes managed the affairs of the home and attempted to civilize her Persian servants. This was by no means an easy feat, she complains:

> It is no exaggeration to say that to keep things up to even a very low European standard is an exceedingly exhausting task. And every lady in

> Persia with whom I discussed the 'servant question,' confessed to an intense irritation of the nerves, engendered by struggling with these lazy Orientals. (83)

Despite the taxing work of domestic colonization, she seems to derive some pleasure from the overwhelming challenge presented to her, and she catalogues, for the benefit of her female readership in England, the numerous tasks and responsibilities to which she must attend daily.

In the next chapter, "Four Visitors And A Maid," Sykes faces the hardship of finding a new maid in Persia as her Swiss help "proved entirely unsuited to a life of travel" (123). As a result, she hires "one of the despised *Gabres,* or Fire-worshippers" to wait on her (123). The reader might well imagine the arduous task of training an Oriental maid, Sykes confides, but eventually she familiarizes "Baji" with European ways, thus making her more agreeable, honest and efficient. After praising her maid's newly-developed virtues, Sykes writes:

> In common with many Orientals she considered her skin to be of lily whiteness, and was much upset when I presented her with a photo of her brown little self, saying that I had made her black, and that her mother had wept over the insult to her daughter when shown it. For answer I placed one of my hands beside her dark one, but, not to be outdone, she said promptly, "Yes, *Khanum*, you are white because you use that beautiful Feringhee *sabun*," and henceforth she always begged for scraps of my soap, which she took when she went to her bath. I used to wonder if she

> imagined that she became whiter in consequence, but of course never dared to make inquiries on a subject that was evidently a tender one with her! (125)[17]

Sykes plays her role in the project of domestic colonization by instructing her maid to behave in a fashion appropriate to an European maid, while at the same time putting Baji, who aspires to whiteness, in her place as a colonial native. Sykes positions herself as an instructor - to the indigenous woman, but also to her counterparts in England who are reading her travel narrative. Not only does she unveil Persia and Persian women to the female armchair traveller, but she unveils Persian women to Persian women themselves. She insists on proving Baji's Otherness to her by asserting that she is not white, that she is brown, and therefore inferior. Cheryl McEwan suggests that:

> [t]he contact between white women and their colonized counterparts created the possibility of totally unequal and dependent relationships in which British women helped to define themselves, and to define and describe the conditions under which colonized women lived, as well as the nature of those women themselves. (11-12)

Sykes' insistence on her whiteness underscores two images of herself that she is keen to convey; first, that she is a respectable European lady who, despite her travels through the Orient, abides by the social codes and mores of England (as evidenced by the numerous times she mentions having to ride her horse side-saddle); second, her loyalty to Empire cannot be questioned.

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[17] In the citations throughout this dissertation, different systems of transliteration are used; I will be adhering to the system used by the authors.

Upon their departure from Kerman, she claims to feel sad at leaving behind their new home, but then launches into an exuberant celebration of the adventurous colonial spirit:

> And perhaps what distracted my thoughts more than anything else was the fact that I was riding a new horse for the first time - a horse that had never had a lady on its back before, or a side-saddle and English bridle; and to me there are few things more interesting than to get mastery over a spirited animal, and to establish that delightful sympathy which makes the rider and his steed as one. So hurrah for the road again! hurrah for nomadic existence! and hurrah for the *Wanderlust* that lurks in each man's blood, and drives our English race so far from home and kindred over the face of the globe! (191)

Sykes' self-positioning within the rhetoric of Empire as she celebrates the "wanderlust" that drives her and her kindred to other nations in the quest to civilize its inhabitants manifests itself in her panegyric language. Her description of breaking in a horse and the pleasure that the sense of control provides her can be extrapolated to the exhilaration she feels upon arriving in Persia and conducting the business of Empire in her home at Kerman.

Nevertheless, the sense of freedom that Sykes extols as she travels through the country with her brother is compromised by her gender:

> I used to vary my position by taking my cramped knees from the pommels

> and letting my feet hang down; but the more I rode the more I saw the disadvantages of the saddle to which I was condemned. The side-saddle is by no means an ideal invention in my eyes. It is difficult to mount into it from the ground; it is dangerous in riding among hills to be unable to spring off on either side in case of accident; the habit is very apt to be caught on the pommels if the rider falls, and the position in which she sits cramps her much if persisted in for many hours at a slow walk, which is the usual thing in hilly and stony countries. Looking at it from a horse's point of view, it is much heavier than a man's saddle; is very apt to give the animal a sore back; the weight being on one side tires the horse, and it is more difficult to adjust. Some of my lady friends at Tehran always rode on a man's saddle when they went among the hills, modifying their habits to the altered position, which they all assured me was preferable in every way to that which custom obliged them to conform. (248)

Of the local reaction to her presence in Persia, she writes: "I heard afterwards that I was the great attraction, as it passed their comprehension how I could sit on a horse sideways and not come off when I cantered!" (69). Her observations–and complaints-- about riding side-saddle underscore her position as a gendered traveller and serve as a contrast between the European woman's femininity and the absence of feminine charm in the Persian woman. Her celebrity status due to her side-saddle highlights the fact that Persian women do not have the freedom to travel through their own country on horseback, and furthermore, even if they did, they would be incapable of riding in as dignified and competent a manner as Ella Sykes. In this way, she, like other women travellers to the Orient,

> prov[es] . . . the power of an Englishness that could be supposedly inviolate while living and being in the 'East,' which was depicted as the antithesis of the 'West,' even while their narratives were gendered to show the extra effort required to do so and the difficulties faced by women attempting to live in these lands. (Grewal 65)

On the other hand, the freedom Sykes purports to feel when travelling seems elusive since she admits that there are class, gender, and cultural restrictions placed upon her that hamper her mobility and comfort during travel. The pity with which she regards her unfortunate Persian sisters becomes ironized by the restrictions placed upon British women, including herself, in the Victorian and Edwardian periods.[18]

The question of the side-saddle never arises in Bell's *Persian Pictures*. This is unsurprising since Gertrude Bell does not foreground her gender in her writings. According to her biographer, Bell – like Sykes– did travel through Persia on a side-saddle; it was only on her second trip to the Middle East, when she was in Palestine, that she was taught how to ride like a man: " 'No more feminine saddles for me on a long journey,' she announced to her parents. 'Never, never again will I travel on anything else: I have never known real ease in riding till now'" (Wallach 50). Yet, in *Persian*

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[18] After visiting a "Europeanised Persian" woman, who "poured out tea, handing round milk and sugar quite *a l'Anglaise,"* Sykes expresses pity for her because "her lot was by no means a happy one, and [Sykes was] reminded of the caged starling in the Bastille that all day long kept crying, "Let me out! let me out!" (22).

Pictures, there is no mention of any of the discomfort she may have suffered while travelling; indeed, there is nothing to distinguish it as a text written by or for a woman. Bell spent much of her life in a man's world and was not interested in drawing attention to her gender. In fact, according to Grewal, Bell expressed a significant amount of disdain for Englishwomen in the colonies, and dissociated herself and her work from her female counterparts:

> Gertrude Bell, the famous traveler who lived many years among the Bedouins, blamed the Englishwomen in the colonial settlements in Egypt for creating an exclusive society and taking no interest in Arab life. She claimed that such attitudes had brought about the downfall of the British government in India. Bell saw herself as different and superior to the Englishwomen who had accompanied the colonists. (80)

Although there are differences between *Persian Pictures* and *Through Persia on a Side-Saddle*, there are also a number of similarities between the two accounts. Both books conform to the genre of travel writing, a genre that is, in the words of Ali Behdad, "an (af)filiated discourse: it maintains both an institutional affiliation with colonial power and a kind of "filial" relation with other orientalist representations" (111); both writers engage with the Orientalist trope of desire and disappointment as the reality of Persia does not conform to the exoticized Persia of their imagination; both writers represent Persian women as simultaneously exotic and oppressed beings.

In the opening lines to her book, Sykes declares that her passion for the Orient began with a book:

> The 'gorgeous East' has always possessed a strong fascination for me, and after reading [Kinglake's] *Eöthen,* that most delightful book of travels, the indescribable attraction of the Orient became, if possible, stronger than before. (2)

According to Behdad, the late nineteenth-century European traveller arriving in the East on the heels of earlier European travellers always experiences a sense of disappointment upon her arrival. The disappointment of the belated traveller stems from the disjunction between the romance of the Orientalist text and the reality of the Orient. Behdad argues that, "the subject's desire for the Orient is not the desire for the Other; rather, it is a desire defined for him by the Orientalist intertext" (26). Sykes, however, claims to be wholly enamoured of Persia:

> The glamour of the East penetrated me from the first moment of landing on its enchanted shores, and although many a time I encountered hard facts, quite sufficient to destroy the romantic illusions of most folk, yet they struck against mine powerlessly . . . I was, in a way, prepared for much that might come by the perusal of Lord Curzon's comprehensive work on the country . . . For we were bound to see the real East, where we should have none but Orientals for our daily society, and our home would be in a city by contrast with which Tehran would seem almost Western. (3-4)

Sykes' self-representation appears to work in contradiction to Behdad's argument, as she claims to have read travel narratives on Persia in which the "romance is stripped away remorselessly, and Persia, bare and barren as she is in reality, exposed, to the view" (3). She claims that despite the fact that the reality of Persia would have discouraged other travellers, she remains as enchanted as always by the country. Equipped with Lord Curzon's definitive study of Persia, she claims to be prepared to face the difficult conditions of Kerman where they planned "to see the *real* East" (4, emphasis mine).

Nevertheless, despite Sykes' protestations that her favourable impressions of Persia remained unchanged by the reality of its conditions, her access to the "real East" is mediated through what Behdad has termed the "Orientalist intertext." Indeed, despite her claims to the contrary, she succumbs to the disappointment of the belated traveller who yearns for the primitive, untouched land of a mythical past:

> When the traveller looks back on the past history of Persia and remembers what a mighty kingdom it was, and how many powerful rulers it counted among its tributaries, he is surprised not to come across more frequent relics of its departed grandeur. Tehran, the capital, is, to all intents and purposes, quite modern; there is but little to admire in Kasvin, one of the old royal cities, while I am told that even in Isfahan it is difficult to conjure up from the buildings that remain a clear picture of its magnificence and splendour in the days when Shah Abbas held his court there. Shiraz, according to most travellers, is a decided disappointment, save perchance to ardent students of Hafiz and Sadi, and is probably more visited on account of its proximity to the beautiful ruins of Persepolis than for its own merits. Persia, therefore, is by no means a country to

> recommend itself to the ordinary globe-trotter, who is insatiable in the matter of 'sights' . . . The contrast between Persia and India in this way is very marked. (90-91)

Determined as she is to represent herself as an experienced, well-prepared, and intrepid traveller who has consulted a number of books on Persia before embarking upon her journey, Sykes refuses to concede her disappointment with the ugliness of modern Iran; she merely remarks that Persia would not be the ideal place for "the ordinary globe-trotter," a category in which she clearly does not place herself.

Gertrude Bell was a well-educated and intelligent woman who studied Farsi before she went to Persia, and pursued her study of the language while there. Upon her return to England, she completed and published *Persian Pictures*, and began translating the poems of Hafiz. In 1897, she published *Poems from the Divan of Hafiz*, which A.J. Arberry describes as "a remarkable monument to her scholarship and literary gifts; though some twenty hands have put Hafiz into English, her renderings remain the best" (6). Bell, in some ways, is a more interesting figure than Sykes as she appears to have a greater understanding of the country to which she is travelling and a more sophisticated understanding of the politics of travel. Indeed, she appears to have some fun at the expense of the figure of the British traveller to the Orient when she writes:

> Many, many years have passed since the ingenious Shahrzad beguiled the sleepless hours of the Sultan Shahriyar with her deftly-woven stories, and still for us they are as entrancing, as delightful, as they were for him when they first flowed from her lips. Still those exciting volumes keep

> generations of English children on wakeful pillows, still they throw the first glamour of mystery and wonder over the unknown East. . . The supply of bottled magicians seems, indeed, to be exhausted, and the carpets have, for the most part, lost their migratory qualities – travellers must look nowadays to more commonplace modes of progression, but they will be hard put to it from time to time if they do not consent to resign themselves so far to the traditions of their childhood as to seek refuge under a palace roof." (Bell 104-5)

Throughout her narrative, Bell conjures up images of *A Thousand and One Nights* or the *Arabian Nights*, and laments - albeit in tongue-in-cheek fashion - that the stories are part of Persia's past. Bell's (playful) wistfulness that the reality of Persia does not conform to the Orient of her childhood imagination suggests a self-ironizing moment during which she recognizes the fantasies produced by the Orientalist intertext:

> On our way home we stopped before a confectioner's shop and invited him to let us taste of his preserves. He did not, like the confectioner in the Arabian Nights, prepare for us a delicious dish of pomegranate-seeds, but he gave us Rahat Lakoum, and slices of sugared oranges, and a jelly of rose-leaves (for which cold cream is a good European substitute), and many other delicacies, ending with some round white objects, which I take to have been sugared onions, floating in syrup – after we had tasted them we had small desire to continue our experimental repast. (137)

Bell devotes a number of passages to her putative disappointment that the tastes, sights, and sounds of Persia do not conform to those described in the *Arabian Nights*.[19]

Despite their differences, Bell's *Persian Pictures* and Sykes' *Through Persia on a Side-Saddle*, offer portraits of Persia as a quaint, if primitive, and fascinating country. Although Bell was a staunch imperialist throughout her life, Sykes' narrative - perhaps due to the fact that she was travelling with her brother – is more explicit in its support of Empire. For example, Sykes writes:

> Not far from the British Legation are the headquarters of the Indo-European Telegraph line, which deserves mention, as it is one way by which India is connected with Europe. The line runs from Karachi along the Persian Gulf to Bushire and then traverses the whole of Persia, being a wonderful achievement of English energy over Oriental obstructiveness. As in many places, the wire crosses high passes, it naturally often gets broken down during the winter snows, and the telegraph clerks, whose duty it is to test it so many times daily, are frequently forced to sally forth to repair it, however inclement the weather may be. (1901: 15-16)

In her second book on Persia, which will be discussed at greater length in the final section of this chapter, Sykes becomes more aggressive in her pro-colonialist rhetoric. As her representations of oppressed Persian women are challenged by their political activism during the Constitutional Revolution, Sykes makes a more emphatic and unambiguous argument for the presence of British men – and women – in Persia.

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[19] When describing the culture of the bazaar, she refers to a story from *A Thousand And One Nights* about a shopkeeper who waives the price of his wares in exchange for a kiss from a beautiful female customer:

> So reckless a disposition is no longer to be found among Eastern merchants; shopping is now conducted purely on business principles, though not without a charm which is absent from Western counters. (134-5)

Reading the Constitutional Revolution from the postcolonial time-lag:

Ella Sykes' first book, *Through Persia on a Side-Saddle* (1901), is a travel narrative meant for the female armchair traveller, depicting the rigours of living and travelling through the Orient. *Persia and Its People* (1910), published nine years later, claims to be an "objective" analysis of the political and social climate in Persia. It is most notable for its valorization of the British colonial presence in Persia at the time and for Sykes' mis-representation of Persian and British diplomatic relations. Both books, however, gesture to and draw upon male colonial authority. In *Through Persia on a Side-Saddle*, Sykes evokes the authority of her brother, Major (Percy) Sykes; in the preface to *Persia and Its People*, she writes:

> [This book] was written with the idea of giving a popular description of Iran, but at the same time I have striven to be accurate, and where I could not rely on my personal knowledge I gratefully own my obligation to the works of Mr. Benjamin, Professor E.G. Browne, Lord Curzon, Sir C. Markham, Sir W. Muir, Professor W. Jackson, Sir L. Pelly, and Major Sykes among others. (vii)

Sykes lists the names of other individuals – all men – with the exception of C.M.S. missionary Mary Bird, who have contributed to the research in the book, thus invoking the authority of male colonialists and "experts" on Persia in order to legitimize her work.

Sykes begins by describing the country's primitive infrastructure and pre-industrial state. After painting a picture of Persia as technologically backward and desperately in need of the assistance of more advanced European nations, she suggests that British statesmen could come to its aid:

> Persia has merely single-wire telegraph lines, the rickety poplar poles of which are often seen lying on the ground, in which case the Persian official at the nearest station will calmly remark that the line "does not speak to-day." In great contrast to this is the British three-wire line, supported on iron posts, which runs from the Persian frontier on the north-West down to Bushire on the Persian Gulf, from which point messages to India are carried by cable to Bombay, and this line now has a branch from Kashan to Karachi *viâ* British Baluchistan in order to ensure a direct overland connection with our Indian Empire. Owing to the lack of communication very little is done to tap the resources of the country. For example, Persia possesses many minerals, but as she has no railways, roads, or navigable rivers to carry them to the ports or to markets, this source of wealth is almost untouched. The famous turquoise mines near Nishapur, which have been found in the kingdom, and are most inadequately worked, and the valuable Caspian fisheries are leased to a Russian company, most of the sturgeon or salmon caught in abundance finding their way to Russia. . . Sterile as Iran appears to be, yet an able ruler might do great things for his country, and the Englishman cannot but

> long for a man of the type of Lord Cromer to be allowed a free hand in remodelling the administration of the kingdom. (9-10)

The distinctions Sykes makes between the primitive Persian telegraph lines on "rickety poplar poles" and the sophisticated "British three-wire line, supported on iron posts" conjures up the reductive image of the primitive colony in contrast to the modern seat of empire. By revealing the backwardness of Persian society and infrastructure, Sykes adds her voice to those clamouring for British colonial "assistance" to, or rather, exploitation of, Persian resources. Indeed, her concern that some of the country's natural resources are controlled by the Russians emerges from the continuing competition between Russia and England for economic and political control of Persia. Sykes' anxiety over Russia's control over Persian resources comes from a sense of colonial entitlement, and she "long[s] for a man of the type of Lord Cromer" to be allowed the freedom to mine and control the number of resources that she lists as being available for exploitation.

In light of the history of competition for control over Persia, and Sykes' obvious investment in British colonial involvement in the country, her ostensible support for the Constitutional Revolution appears suspect:

> It is too soon to judge how the change from an autocratic rule to that of a Constitutional Government will work; but owing to the agreement of 1907 between England and Russia, Persia has every chance of working out her own salvation. Whatever may be our opinion of the decadence of Persia at the present day, surely an empire which took its rise some five centuries before Christ, and is an independent kingdom in the twentieth-century

> after Christ, must hold within it the elements of renewal? That Persia may succeed in her arduous task of regeneration is the earnest wish of all Englishmen who take any interest in the country. (38)

It is particularly audacious of her to suggest that the 1907 Anglo-Russian treaty, that effectively colonized the country by awarding territorial control to the Russians in the north and to the British in the south, and was drawn up without the knowledge of the Iranians, secured the potential for a constitutional democracy.[20] Sykes is a strong supporter of empire; after all, her brother, Sir Percy Sykes was in Persia on official business of empire-building. Although *Through Persia on a Side-Saddle* is a gendered narrative, written for a female audience, *Persia and Its People* offers no indication of the writer's gender. The subject of her narrative is the male colonial traveller:

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[20] *The Times* (London) provided extensive coverage of the Constitutional Revolution. On 15 October, 1908, the newspaper published a manifesto written by Persian nationalists driven into exile after the bombardment of the parliament building by the government. The manifesto is signed by Moazid-e Saltaneh, Deputy for Tehran, and Taghizadeh, Deputy for Tabriz, both of whom were living in England as political refugees at that time. It outlines the position and the goals of the nationalists and constitutionalists in Persia and ends by appealing to Britain "to refrain from every sort of intervention, and, in particular from lending money to the Shah, or from raising political difficulties tending to impede our lawful endeavours to ensure our liberty and progress, and further to prevent other Powers from so intervening" (8). On the following page, *The Times* published an editorial in response to the nationalists' manifesto:

> [W]hile we are willing to express the fullest sympathy with their eloquent plea, we are constrained to point out that its main purport is already conceded. They ask that foreign Powers shall not interfere in the Persian crisis, and that Persia may be left to work out her own salvation. Great Britain has never desired to adopt any other policy, and the mistaken assumption of the Persian Nationalists that British influence contributed to the downfall of the Mejliss is utterly without foundation . . . The Persian refugees, therefore, ought to recognize that they are asking for what they have already. British and Russian aims have no other object than the readjustment of the stability of Persia . . . Both Powers wish, in short, that Persia should work out her own salvation, though they are not unwilling to tender their advice when occasion arises. (9)

The editorial invokes the self-serving image of Britain as an altruistic power, which the government strived to project in order to legitimize its plundering of the resources of foreign lands. This duplicitous self-representation, which aims to justify colonial incursion into the Orient, is one in which Ella Sykes, and other Western women, participated with great enthusiasm.

> There is also an exhilirating [sic] sense of power in [the traveller's] capacity for surmounting the various obstacles in his path, and if he has been over-civilised all his days, the song of the desert leading him ever forward into undiscovered lands where possibly adventures may await him, has an indescribable enchantment. Again, he is an Englishman among Orientals, and it adds something to his pride of race to see how instinctively Persian and Baluch look to the Sahib in all emergencies; and he feels, as never before, that in a way he himself is upholding, in a very slight degree, the honour of the British Empire. Half-unconsciously, he knows that his conduct day by day is setting the standard by which his compatriots will be judged, and such a thought is a powerful stimulus to keep a man at his best. (194-5)

This passage extols the virtues and the honour of the British Empire and praises the spirit of "wanderlust" that she celebrates in *Through Persia*. Sykes invokes the language of racial progression as she glorifies the involvement of British colonial officers in the country; the evolutionary model upon which she draws to justify the intervention of British men in Persia also enables her to make a case for the presence of the white woman in the country.

I propose to read Western women's representations of Persian women during the 1905-1911 Constitutional Revolution by drawing on Homi Bhabha's notion of the "time-lag," and opening up a space for what he calls a "postcolonial contramodernity"(244). Postcolonial contramodernity, or the "postcolonial translation of modernity," he argues, is enabled by "introduc[ing] the question of subaltern agency into the question of modernity" (Bhabha 244). In "'Race,' time and the revision of modernity," Bhabha applies Frantz Fanon's discussion of blackness to a more generalized argument on the condition of "the marginalized, the displaced, the diasporic" (236). Bhabha argues that Fanon's figure of the belated black man disrupts the temporality of the discourse of modernity by destroying:

> two time-schemes in which the historicity of the human is thought. [Fanon] rejects the 'belatedness' of the black man because it is only the opposite of the framing of the white man as universal, normative . . . the black man refuses to occupy the past of which the white man is the future. But Fanon also refuses the Hegelian-Marxist dialectical schema whereby the black man is part of a transcendental sublation . . . Fanon . . . suggests another time, another space . . . of being that is wrought from the interruptive, interrogative, tragic experience of blackness, of discrimination, of despair. (Bhabha 237-8)

There is, according to Bhabha, a caesura, a time-lag "effected in the continuist, progressivist myth of man," and it is this temporal break that enables the postcolonial or diasporic subject to emerge into full presence (236). It is through the time-lag, or caesura, in the discourse of modernity that the belated body of the raced subject can be read, and it is the presence, the readiblity, the enunciative site of the racialized, the colonized body that disorders and disrupts the teleological narrative of modern progress. The final section of this chapter will examine Western women's progressivist narratives about Persia and Persian women from the time-lag of postcolonial contramodernity. Reading their writings from this time-lag effects a disruption of the figure of the belated Persian woman and facilitates the emergence of a counterfigure: that of an agential, revolutionary woman in early twentieth-century Persia.

Despite many differences between the narratives of American Presbyterian women, British Anglican women, and the travel writings of Gertrude Bell and Ella Sykes, all of whom are writing approximately in the same historical period, there exists a shared desire in their texts for an inscription of the passive body of the Persian woman. In *Persia and its People*, Sykes offers a detailed and rather alarming trajectory of the dejected and degenerate life of the Persian woman since "from the cradle to the grave- nay, even in the life beyond the grave - the balance weighs heavily in favour of the Persian man as compared with the Persian woman" (*Persia* 63). In a talk to the *National Geographic Society* in October of 1910, the same year *Persia and Its People* was published, Sykes describes Iranian gender relations by turning to a "kind of 'projective' past" (Bhabha 238):

> In order to understand Persian domestic life at the present day, we must carry ourselves back to patriarchal times. The Persian is lord and master of his house much as was Abraham or Jacob . . . When a woman is handed

> over to her husband with her dowry, he regards her far more as a chattel than as a wife. ("A Talk" 851)

Bhabha argues that representations of a culture as timeless or as part of a distant past are "a mode of 'negativity' that mak[e] the enunciatory present of modernity disjunctive" (238). The concept of timelessness, he claims, opens up a time-lag within the myth of modern progress and "displays the *problem of the ambivalent temporality of modernity*" (239, emphasis his).

The most intriguing passages in *Persia and Its People* are those which create a temporal disjunction between Sykes' colonialist, progressivist narrative and the emergence of counter-narratives that challenge the time-scheme she uses to describe the lives of Persian women. In a chapter dedicated to "The Persian woman," Sykes begins thus:

> Europeans travelling in Asia sometimes assert cheerfully that all is well with the Eastern woman, and that she would not change lots with her Western sister if she could, as she is thoroughly contented with things as they are. When, however, we come to look at the facts of the case, we shall find that the picture they compose is by no means one of roseate hue (196).

The anxiety here emerges in reaction to contradictory representations: if there are representations of Persian women as independent and as contemporaneous with their British counterparts, then the body of the British woman, and indeed, that of the British man, in Persia become superfluous. If Persia -- and Persian women -- cannot be represented as part of a collective past from which European nations and European women have evolved, then the project of British imperialism – and the mobility of the British woman – become threatened. In order to counteract what she perceives to be misleading representations of Persian women as "thoroughly contented," Sykes catalogues the appalling facets of a Persian woman's life; she concludes the chapter by reiterating the pronouncement that a Persian woman leads a life of unadulterated misery:

> The life of a Persian woman, taken as a whole, cannot be considered a happy one, and the victims of Islam recognise that their fate is hard when they are brought into contact with European women . . . Certainly the yoke of Mohammedanism presses heavily on the Persian woman, and, through her, on the entire race, for how can a nation make real progress if the mothers of its men are kept in bondage and ignorance?

When the writer became acquainted with a few Persian women, she "found that a latent discontent with their restricted surroundings was fanned into life by the tremendous contrast between the unfettered existence of an Englishwoman and their own" (*Persia* 208-9). By ensuring that her reader has a vivid picture of the horror that is the life of the Persian woman, she makes a case for the importance of the presence of the British woman in Persia. For, according to Sykes, it is only when Persian women come into contact with European women that a "latent discontent" with their lot is realized and articulated. Similarly, Persian peoples in general could only benefit from their contact with British travellers and colonial officers; in this manner, Sykes inscribes her support for British colonialist policies and her complicity with British imperial interests in Persia.

The second conference sponsored by the American Presbyterian Society was held in Lucknow, India in 1911. In their papers, Christian missionary women lament the unenviable social status of their Moslem "sisters" in much the same vein as at the Cairo Conference. These papers, edited once again by Annie Van Sommer and Reverend Samuel Zwemer, were published separately as a "Women's Volume" under the title: *Daylight in the Harem: A New Era for Moslem Women* (5). This volume, like its predecessor, *Our Moslem Sisters*, targets a Christian female audience, and the editors "send it forth, with a prayer that God may use it to stir into flame the embers of devotion to the cause of Moslem Women which are as yet only smouldering in the hearts of Christian Women" (5). In a speech summarizing the work of missionaries in Oriental countries, Van Sommer reads from a letter sent to her by a missionary woman in Persia. The letter details the efforts made by Christian missionaries to prevent child marriage in Persia and to encourage the pursuit of education for Persian girls:

> As for twenty years at least, we have always had some Moslem girls in our school, and have continually striven to impress upon the women the inexpediency and wrong of sending little girls into homes, where they are strangers, just when they need their mother's careful guidance; the time in school has in many cases gradually lengthened, and this term we have many older girls in the Boarding Department of our school. In all, this year, we have had about twenty-seven Moslem Boarders, some of them would in the old time have been given years ago to husbands. I have had special opportunities for telling Moslem women of Christ, and they listen

> as well, if not better, than they have before. As in all religions the women are much more tenacious in their hold on Islam than the men are. (41)

The unnamed letter-writer emphasizes the importance of missionary work in Persia and of the various accomplishments of missionary women in their interactions with Persian women. But the letter also reveals an anxiety that the missionaries' efforts to convert their Moslem sisters have been not entirely successful since, "the women are much more tenacious in their hold on Islam than the men are." The implication here is that the missionaries are not quite as welcome as they had imagined and that Persian women might not be necessarily awaiting "liberation" through the intervention of Christian missionaries. This discordant note in the narrative of progress and of emancipation for Moslem women introduces an anxiety that repeatedly re-surfaces in the missionary texts. The anxiety that emerges in Sykes' writings about the mis-representation of Persian women as contented and in the British missionary's letter read at the Lucknow Conference regarding the unwillingness of Moslem women to convert to Christianity are further informed by a particular historical moment in Persia: the 1905-1911 Constitutional Revolution.

During this period, there was widespread demand amongst secular nationalists and religious clerics for "public welfare, public education, a house of justice (Edalat Khaneh), equality, protection of life and property and liberty through secular law, and the establishment of parliamentary democracy" (Paidar 52). In order to mitigate further economic devastation and colonization of the country's resources, the Iranian populace demanded a constitutional democracy whereby the Shah would be accountable to the people. According to Paidar, "[w]omen's political activities in this period ranged from circulating information, spreading news, acting as informers and messengers, participating in demonstrations and taking up arms in protest" (52).

In December of 1905, a large group of clerics, merchants and women occupied the shrine of Shahzadeh Abdolazim demanding that Mozaffar El-Din Shah convene a House of Justice (Paidar 53). Large groups of women outside the shrine used their bodies as human barriers to protect the demonstrators from armed government forces; these women also surrounded the Shah's carriage and demanded that he respect the peoples' wishes for a constitutional democracy. Iranian feminist historians have remarked that one of the first threats against the life of the Shah was uttered by a woman:

> As Muzaffar al-Din Shah descended from his carriage, [Mrs Jahangir] cut through the circle of guards and handed him a letter. This was a warning from the Revolutionary Committee of Tehran that if he did not set up a "Majlis of the representatives of the nation to spread justice as in all civilized nations of the world" he would be killed. Mrs. Jahangir's house was a meeting place and an arms cache for the radical constitutionalists during the years of the revolution. She lost both her son and her nephew during the June 1908 coup. (Afary 371, n 8)

The occupation of the shrine ended in January 1906 when the Shah conceded to convening a House of Justice.

In July 1906, several consecutive days of public demonstrations broke out when it became clear that the Shah was reneging on his promise. The demonstrations resulted in a three-week occupation of the British Legation and the protesters were vociferous in their demands for a constituent assembly and for a constitution (Paidar 54). Despite efforts by both Persian and British men to prevent the active participation of Persian women at this time, large numbers of Persian women held demonstrations outside the Legation and the royal palace while other women chose to support the protests financially (Paidar 54).

The first Majles, or Parliament, opened in October 1906 and drafted a Fundamental Law "which was basically a translation of the Belgian Constitution" (Paidar 55). The Fundamental Law severely curtailed the Shah's power while granting "extensive powers to the Majles as the representative of the nation" (Paidar 55). One of the decisions made by the Majles was to reject the government plan to request loans from Britain and Russia in order to pay its debts. The Iranian populace donated their own money – and women their jewels - to the national coffers in order to set up a national bank. Women were strong nationalists, but they also demanded the right to vote – which alienated some of the members of the clergy who subsequently abandoned their "nationalist" position and joined the royalist forces opposed to the Constitution.

In June 1908, the government bombed the Majles and thus sparked a civil war between the constitutionalists and the royalists. The Shah surrounded the city of Tabriz which had strong constitutional support and launched a ten-month siege of the city. During this time, Persian women--disguised as men--fought alongside Persian men in defense of the city and in defense of an ideal of democracy and equal rights for all citizens. Janet Afary writes:

> *Anjuman* [newspaper] published reports that bodies of armed women dressed in men's clothing had been found in the battlefields of Amirkhiz and Khiaban alongside those of the men. Peasant women in the small villages of Azerbaijan "bundled their new-born babies on their backs, picked up guns," and fought alongside the men. *Habl al-Matin* [newspaper] reported that in one of the battles of Tabriz twenty women, disguised in men's clothing, were found among the dead. (194)

In July 1909, after ten months of fighting, Persian men and women nationalists managed to regain control of the city and a constitutional government was established.

In 1911, the Majles employed an American, Morgan Shuster, to help organize the country's finances. The Russians--to whom the Persian government was heavily in debt--issued an ultimatum to the Majles: the Majles was to dismiss Shuster immediately or the Russians would invade. This sparked an outrage in the country and another series of mass protests in which women were once again actively involved. Persian women stormed the Majles carrying pistols under their veils and threatened to kill their husbands and sons and themselves if the Majles succumbed to the threats of the Russian government (Paidar 58, Afary 204). Despite the waves of protest across the country, the Majles dismissed Shuster within three weeks of the Russian ultimatum and the Qajar monarch succeeded in closing the Majles and sending its members into exile. However, the disintegration of the Parliament and its goals for a constitutional monarchy did not hinder the massive proliferation of women's political organizations and women's schools during that period.

Persian women, veiled, unveiled, or disguised in male garb emerged into the public sphere demanding national and international recognition of their rights as women and as nationalists. The emergence of the belated body of the Persian woman, to borrow from Bhabha, "displays the ambivalent temporality of modernity" by threatening the image of Christian missionaries in Persia who saw themselves as instructors to their servile Persian sisters, to intrepid adventuresses such as Ella Sykes and Gertrude Bell who represented themselves as liberated and modern in contrast to imprisoned and backward Persian women, and to Suffragist women who saw themselves as the leaders of the international women's movement (Burton 1991: 49; Weber 151; Rupp 10).

On 5 December 1911, *The Times* (London) published, under the caption "Appeal From The Women," a telegraph from the *Persian Women's Society* addressed to women suffragists in Britain:

> To Women's Suffragist Committee, London.- The Russian Government by an ultimatum demands us to surrender to her our independence; the ears of the men of Europe are deaf to our cries; could you women not come to our help?

In reply, the Women's Social and Political Union wrote this message:

> Badrod Doja, Persian Women's Society, Tehran.
>
> Your touching appeal received. Unhappily we cannot move British Government to give political freedom even to us, their own countrywomen. We are equally powerless to influence their action towards Persia. Our hearts deeply moved by sympathy with Persian

> sisters and admiration for their militant patriotic deeds. (5)

The telegram is signed by [Emmeline] Pankhurst and [Emmeline] Pethick Lawrence, leading members of the *Women's Social and Political Union*, which was seen as the more "militant" branch of the suffragist movement (Holton 110; Rupp 1997: 137).

The missionary women at the Lucknow Conference seem aware that they cannot ignore the prominent role played by Persian women in the demonstrations, particularly since the London Times published extended coverage of the political events and of the feminist movements in Persia. Nevertheless, the missionary texts attempt to contain the tremendous implications of these events in two ways: First, they claim that the reforms do not address the fundamental problem of Islam as a degenerate religion. In a letter read by Van Sommer at the Conference, the (unnamed) writer observes:

> [t]here is very much to be desired in the so-called reforms. It is all apparently outward and not inward, *i.e.* expressing no change of heart or contrition for sin. Not all that they have adopted is good; with the commendable change in bad customs and the efforts to obtain education have come many of the vices of Europe. Wickedness is much increased, while the decline of faith and observance of Islam only leaves the people with no restraining motive. The problem of the Missionary is the same old difficult one, how to bring the Gospel to impenitent hearts. (34)

The Christian missionaries thus attempt to contain the threat of the enunciative presence of the belated body of the Persian woman by lamenting the religious ignorance of the Persians and by justifying the continuance of their own work in Persia so as "*individuals*

[Persians may] be *regenerated* while as a nation they are seeking reform" (36). "Miss G.Y. Holliday" ends her talk on "Awakening Womanhood" in Persia by referring to the feminist anti-veiling protests in Persia as follows:

> As to discarding the veil, I should be very sorry to see them going with uncovered faces till they have a religion which requires purity of heart instead of outward restraint, and which knows neither polygamy nor divorce. There are no more beautiful, capable, or clever women in the world, than many of our Persian sisters. It rests largely with us to say how much longer they shall be deprived of the privileges we have so long enjoyed that we have ceased to appreciate them.

The uncompromising presence of the belated body of the Persian woman is anxiety-producing for the Christian missionaries, and they attempt to contain its implications by proffering an image of the ignorant (and passive) Persian woman swept up in the reform movements out of "false consciousness" and without "purity of heart."

Second, the missionaries attempt to defuse the significance of the Persian nationalist and feminist movements by claiming responsibility for igniting the desire for reform amongst students at the missionary schools. Holliday claims that, "one of our school boys, in a public meeting, boldly advocated the removal of the veil, and the equal education of men and women. He is a young man of some importance, having a government position. The veil will not soon pass, but there is a noticeable carelessness in its use" (126). Furthermore, the missionaries attempt to reinscribe the image of the passive Persian woman who needs the Christian missionary -- or the product of missionary schools, such as the Persian "school boy"-- to advocate for their rights on their behalf. In this way, the missionaries re-affirm their necessary presence in Persia.

Sykes, on the other hand, categorically refuses to acknowledge the presence of the Persian woman in the nationalist struggle. She re-inscribes a particular vision of the Persian woman as subservient by refusing to acknowledge her active participation in the public protests during the revolutionary period. The manifestation of the belated Persian body presents a threat to the figure of Ella Sykes who represents British involvement in Persia as paradigmatic of the Empire's benevolence and of its commitment to guiding primitive races along the path to democracy and enlightenment. Although the Christian Missionaries and Sykes deploy different strategies in recuperating the figure of the passive Persian woman, they share the need to re-veil the threatening "present and presence" of the Persian woman by claiming that she is always already shrouded in the shadow and darkness of Islam (Bhabha 251).

The belated body of the Persian woman disturbs the temporality of British women's narratives. The Constitutional revolution and Persian women's active participation in the revolution at that time represents a caesura, a temporal break in the teleological narrative of European imperial progress. If the Persian woman's body could be seen as "civilized" and "modern," then the body of the British woman in Persia would become superfluous.

The anxiety about Persian women echoes in all the papers on Persia at the Lucknow Conference because the Constitutional reforms and the women's movements in Persia at the time were perceived to be indicative of a growing, indigenous, "modern" period in the country -- and nothing could be more disturbing to the concept of Imperial time and progress than a concomitant move towards "social progress" and emancipation in a backward and primitive country. The time-lag of postcolonial modernity or contramodernity thus moves in contradiction to the myth of progress. It is a movement that is "neither teleological nor is it an endless slippage. It is a function of the lag to slow down the linear, progressive time of modernity to reveal its "gesture," the pauses and stresses of the whole performance" (Bhabha 253). Reading the enunciative present or presence of the belated female body in the caesura of modernity enables a reading of national and cultural histories as dialectical and atemporal and as moving outside the binarisms of past/present, primitive/modern. Reading history from this time-lag presents a fundamental challenge to Imperial discourse and as a consequence, to the contingent subject position of Western women within the linear narrative of Imperial progress. More importantly, however, it enables a reading of the "value-coding" of imperial texts and creates a space for the presence of the agential Persian woman (Spivak 1990: 228).

Chapter Two

Global Sisters in Revolutionary Iran

The discourse of sisterhood emerges out of nineteenth-century American and British evangelical and early feminist movements.[21] By claiming sisterhood with backward Persian women, Western women argued for the importance of their presence in the East. Thus, the Orient afforded them the opportunity to move outside the prescribed roles delineated for them in England and the United States. Western women represented themselves as indispensable to the missionary project, and the goal of empire, by foregrounding the importance of gender in the colonial project:

> The entire edifice of missionary "feminism" – the employment opportunities, the valorization of (British) women's skills and virtues, the institutional and social space for self-assertion, collective action, and aggressive challenging of male prerogatives – rested on the existence of a degraded female Other in the colonies and at home. The missionary rationale for women's escape from the separate sphere, in other words, actively depended on the subordination of their heathen sisters. (Thorne 60)

The superiority of Western women in relation to Oriental, or Persian, women remained an essential part of the discursive structure of sisterhood through its various incarnations, in the language of religious salvation, and that of international suffrage. Antoinette Burton maintains that:

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[21] Some of the material in this chapter has appeared in "Five Minutes of Silence: Voices of Iranian Feminists in the post-revolutionary age." *Postcolonizing the Commonwealth*. Ed. Rowland Smith. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Press, 2000.

> . . . suffrage internationalism commanded the presence of non-Western women as showpieces in a global sisterhood whose existence was seen as proof of the vitality of British women's suffrage itself. Whether it objectified eastern women as thoroughly degraded or in the process of "awakening" to their own liberation, the international women's movement staged their silence and subordinated them to Western suffragists in an imaginary as well as an institutionalized feminist world order. (1991: 65)

I agree with Burton's contention that the rise of the Western feminist is predicated upon the figural subjugation of the Oriental (in this case, Persian) woman. I would add that the pre-revolutionary, state-sponsored Iranian feminist benefited equally from this representation. Although the language of gender oppression mobilized by missionary and first wave feminists recognized the mutual oppression of women, Persian women somehow always emerged as more backward than their Western sisters, and in desperate need of their benevolent enlightenment.

The rhetoric of universal women's oppression was re-framed and popularized during the "second wave" of feminism. In *The Routledge Critical Dictionary of Feminism and Postfeminism* (1999), Sue Thornham identifies the principal difference between first wave feminists and second wave feminists as a shift from a position of "equal rights" liberal feminism to a more radical "women's liberation" movement; she writes: "[w]hilst 'old feminism' was individualist and reformist. . . 'women's liberation' was collective and revolutionary" (Thornham 29).

Within the second wave feminist movement itself, there were two dominant currents of thought. Deborah Babcox and Madeline Belkin, editors of *liberation now! Writings From The Women's Liberation Movement* (1971), emphasize the differences between the "reformers," led by *The National Organization of Women*'s (NOW) Betty Friedan, and self-styled "revolutionaries" such as themselves. The former founded NOW "as a direct result of the failure of America's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to take seriously the issue of sex discrimination" (Thornham 30), and the latter claimed that they were inclusive of racial and class differences:

> Most of the women in NOW, like Betty Friedan, are white, middle class or upper middle class, and professional. From the outset the politics of NOW have been reformist, aiming to integrate women into the mainstream of American society. Radical women feel an analysis of our economic system shows that sex, race and class discrimination are necessary to maintain the control over wealth and resources by the ruling classes and that the role of women will not basically change until there is a radical reorganization of power in America. This view differs from NOW's reformism in that we believe that power will not voluntarily be relinquished by those who hold it and that only revolution will accomplish this end. (Babcox and Belkin 4)

The rhetoric of women's solidarity and collectivity was undermined by divisiveness amongst second wave feminists from the movement's early days. Nevertheless, the myth of the "Golden Age of Feminism" perpetuates itself in sentimentalized accounts by 1970s feminists, or in works that evoke the spirit of the second wave, such as *Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings From The Women's Liberation Movement* (1970), and *Sisterhood is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology* (1984), edited by Robin Morgan, *The New Women: Motive Anthology on Women's Liberation* (1970), edited by Joanne Cooke, Charlotte Bunch-Weeks, and Robin Morgan, *Women Unite! An Anthology of the Canadian Women's Movement* (1972), compiled and published by Canadian Women's Educational Press, Marcia Cohen's *The Sisterhood: The Inside Story of the Women's Movement and the Leaders Who Made It Happen* (1988), Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (1991), Marilyn French's *The War Against Women* (1992), *Integrative Feminisms: Building Global Visions 1960s-1990s* (1996), by Angela Miles, and most recently, the immensely popular stage production based on Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* (1998).

Working-class women and women of colour protested their absence of representation at conferences and rallies, and most significantly, at the 1975 UN Conference on Women in Mexico City. By the early 1980s, there were publications such as *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color* (1981), edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, Angela Davis' *Women, Race & Class* (1981), and *Women, Culture, & Politics* (1989), *All the Women are White, all the Blacks are men, but some of us are brave* (1982), edited by Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith, and *Frontiers: Selected essays and writings on racism and culture 1984-1992* (1992), edited by Marlene Nourbese Philip, in which women wrote about their exclusion from the mainstream feminist movement on the basis of race, class, and sexuality.[22]

Feminist critics of global sisterhood have argued that the crux of the problem with the language of 1960s and 1970s feminism was its call for solidarity amongst all women with the assumption that they were bound together in "common oppression" (hooks 127). bell hooks has remarked that global sisterhood failed in the 1970s because of the assumption of women's shared oppression, and furthermore, that those who raised the banner of universal oppression were white bourgeois feminists who wanted to position themselves as leaders of the feminist movement, not merely as its members (132). This kind of hierarchical structure within feminist organizations hearkens back to the origins of global sisterhood when the missionaries of the nineteenth century claimed to bring the good news of the Bible but also of women's rights and social justice to their less fortunate sisters in the East (Jayawardena 24). Global sisters in the 1970s, however, claimed that women the world over had one thing in common: regardless of race, culture, or class, all women suffered the indignity of patriarchal oppression. They also managed to recruit and showcase women representatives of the third world in more visible ways than did global sisters in the early part of the century. Global feminist relationships across class and cultural boundaries have been, and continue to be, played out in an educational arena where one group of "sisters" aims to enlighten and educate another less-informed group of "sisters."

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[22] It is not my intention here to trace the history of the sometimes fractured second wave feminist movement as there have been many informed accounts of that period. Some noteworthy critical engagements with global feminist politics and literary criticism are: bell hooks. *Ain't I a Woman? black women and feminism.* Boston: South End Press, 1981, and *Feminist Theory: From Margin To Center*. Boston: South End Press, 1984; Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar, "Challenging Imperial Feminism." *Feminist Review*. 17. (Autumn 1984): 3-19; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." *Critical Inquiry*. 12.1 (Autumn 1985): 243-261; ---."Imperialism and Sexual Difference." *Oxford Literary Review*. 8.1-2. (1986): 225-240; ---. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1988; Hazel V. Carby, "White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood." 1982. *Materialist Feminism: A Reader In Class, Difference, And Women's Lives*. Eds. Rosemary Hennessy And Chrys Ingraham. New York: Routledge, 1997. 110-128; and *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987; *Feminisms: an anthology of literary theory and criticism*. Eds Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1991; *Third World Women and The Politics of Feminsm*. Eds. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991; *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*. Eds. Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992; Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History*. London: Verso, 1992. Ruth Frankenberg, *The Social Construction of Whiteness: white women, race matters*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1993; Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865*-1915. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina,1994; *Feminism Beside Itself*. Eds. Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman. New York: Routledge, 1995; Kumari Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia During British Rule*. New York: Routledge, 1995; *Gender and Imperialism*. Ed. Claire Midgley. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1998; Sherene Razack, *Looking White People In The Eye: Gender, Race, And Culture in Courtrooms And Classrooms*. Toronto: U of T Press, 1998; and Meyda Yegenogu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a feminist reading of Orientalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.

This chapter, which will examine the intersection of second wave (Western) feminist voices with Iranian feminist voices in the 1970s, particularly at the moment of the 1979 Iranian revolution, attempts to move towards what Sherene Razack has called "a politics of accountability" (159):

> [A] [p]olitics of accountability. . . begins with. . .the recognition that there is no stable core we can call women's experience. Equally important, it is a politics guided by a search for the ways in which we are complicitous in the subordination of others. A feminist politics of accountability cannot proceed on the assumption that as women we are uninvolved in the subordination of others. If we take as our

> point of departure that systems of domination interlock and sustain one another, we can begin to identify those moments when we are dominant and those when we are subordinate. Our implication in various systems of domination means that there are several ways in which we can perform ourselves as dominant at the same time that we understand ourselves to be engaging in liberatory politics. (159)

In this chapter, I will examine the cross-cultural engagement of 1970s Western feminists with Pahlavi feminists in order to examine more closely the tensions that arose between these two feminist groups and between anti-imperialist Iranian feminists who participated actively in the revolution. The failure of cross-cultural feminist collaboration during the anti-imperialist feminist demonstrations of 1979 epitomize, I believe, the limitations of the discourse of sisterhood.

The tensions that emerged out of the failed moment of a global feminist vision have provoked divisions within the ranks of diasporic Iranian feminists, as well as between some diasporic Iranian feminists and active indigenous Iranian feminists. These contentious relationships mirror the types of generational debates about the future of feminist criticism and activism currently occurring between Western feminists.[23] In the

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[23] For inter-generational debates between Western feminists, see Susan Gubar, "What Ails Feminist Criticism?" *Critical Inquiry* 24.4 (Summer 1998): 878-902, and "Notations in *Medias Res.*" *Critical Inquiry* 25.2 (Winter 1999): 380-396; Robyn Wiegman, "What Ails Feminist Criticism? A Second Opinion." *Critical Inquiry* 25.2 (Winter 1999): 362-79, and "Feminism, Institutionalism, and the Idiom of Failure." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 11.3 (Fall 1999/2000): 107-136; Rey Chow, "When Whiteness Feminizes. . . : Some Consequences of a Supplementary Logic." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 11.3 (Fall 1999/2000): 137-168. For debates between diasporic Iranian feminists on the merits and/or shortcomings of pre and post-revolutionary Iranian feminism, see Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious*

1970s, however, global sisterhood was the dominant feminist discourse and this chapter will explore the ways in which this discourse inserted itself into the Iranian feminist arena during what Parvin Paidar has identified as the fourth and final phase of modernity in Iran, an era "characterized by the state's double strategy of political repression and aggressive modernization" (28).

By the late 1950s in Iran, the large number of independent women's organizations which had formed in the forties and early fifties were now directly controlled by the newly-formed *High Council of Women's Organizations* headed by the Shah's twin sister, Ashraf Pahlavi (Najmabadi 1991: 60). In 1966, the Shah, who was tightening his control over all aspects of public life, replaced the *High Council* with the state-sponsored *Women's Organization of Iran* (WOI). The women's organizations previously contained by the *High Council* were now dissolved and absorbed into one large state-controlled organization with a sizeable budget "under the presidency of Princess Ashraf and Mrs. Farideh Diba, the Queen's mother" (Paidar 149). The board of the organization consisted of nine men who held high-ranking positions in government and only one woman, Mrs. Farrokhru Parsa, the minister of education (Paidar 149).[24] As Paidar has observed, "[t]his

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Debate in Contemporary Iran. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999; Haideh Moghissi, "Émigré Iranian Feminism and the Construction of Muslim Woman." *Émigré Feminism: Transnational Perspectives*. Ed. Alena Heitlinger. Toronto: U of T Press, 1999. 189-207, and *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of postmodern analysis*. London: Zed Press, 1999; Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Feminisms in an Islamic Republic." *Transitions, Environments, Translations: Feminisms in International Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1997. 390-99.

[24] At the height of revolutionary fervour, Farrokhru Parsa was arrested and charged with the crime of prostitution by the nascent Islamic Republic; she was later executed (Paidar 347).

was the second women's organisation to come into existence since the constitutional period which had male leadership. The Ladies' Centre set up by Reza Shah [in 1935] and the Women's Organisation of Iran both involved women at grass-roots level and men at decision-making level" (149).

The women members of the WOI tried to circumvent the Shah's inflexibility on women's issues by cultivating and maintaining a good working relationship with influential government officials (Paidar 149). Members of the WOI were, for the most part, royalists from privileged social and economic backgrounds, and the reforms for which they worked often did not speak to the urban poor or the peasant classes in rural Iran.[25] Nevertheless, Ashraf Pahlavi tirelessly represented herself as a progressive feminist and as someone who was leading Iranian women along the path to feminist enlightenment. In a forceful article published in 1980, Azar Tabari draws attention to the "absent peasant woman" in Iranian feminist projects--contained and controlled by the Shah under the guise of the WOI--in the 1960s and 1970s. Tabari contests official Pahlavi reports about the merits of the Shah's "White Revolution," his grandiose plans of taking Iran out of the category of a third world country and placing it alongside the United States as a country with significant economic, political, and social power. As during the Constitutional Revolution, Iranian women were used as indicators of the image of modernity the nation sought to project. The Shah's dreams of modernization, claims Tabari, were carried out at the expense of the rural and urban working classes. Despite the rhetoric of Ashraf Pahlavi and the WOI about advancing the rights and the status of all Iranian women, Tabari contends that in fact:

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[25] For an excellent discussion of the problems of the WOI's project of educational reform and "modernization" of the rural classes, see Zohreh Sullivan, "Eluding the Feminist, Overthrowing the Modern? Transformations in Twentieth-Century Iran." *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*. Ed. Lila Abu-Lughod. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998.

> [m]any factors contributed to a sharp deterioration in the daily life of the peasant woman, intensifying her exploitation and reinforcing her traditionally degraded status. First, as a direct result of land reform, the need for female and child labour on peasant family plots increased tremendously . . . Often the male head of the household as well as the older sons would migrate to the towns in search of a construction or industrial job to increase the cash income of the family, leaving the field work to the women and younger children . . . Secondly, the growth in mechanized large-scale agricultural production increased the demand for seasonal agricultural labour. The bulk of this was again provided by women and children. Thirdly, the growth of an urban home-market as well as the traditional export markets for Iranian carpets greatly increased the numbers of weavers. More than ninety per cent of all carpet weavers are female, and forty per cent of these are under the age of fifteen . . . The majority of rural carpet-weavers--eighty-nine per cent--are *unpaid* family workers. (21, emphasis hers)

The rhetoric of feminism as articulated by the WOI appeared to speak little--if at all--to the material needs and concerns of Iranian peasant women. Tabari suggests that the women who reaped most of the benefits from the work advanced by the state-controlled feminists in Iran were women of the privileged educated classes who already had access to an "upwardly mobile" world (22). This led to an ever-widening gap between the working classes and the upper-middle classes in the mid to late 1970s in Iran, and the feminist agenda of the time appeared to address solely the concerns of a relatively privileged and educated class of women.

Claims about the elitism of the WOI are contested by Haleh Esfandiari who worked as an official of the organization. In *Reconstructed Lives: Women and Iran's Islamic Revolution* (1997), Esfandiari argues that the feminist activities currently undertaken by Iranian women under the Islamic Republic have been made possible by the past efforts of the WOI. Underlying Esfandiari's central thesis is a secondary concern: she admits that since the revolution, the WOI has come under attack for being too "Westernized," but she dismisses this claim as a groundless accusation. According to Esfandiari, the vast majority of the beneficiaries of the WOI were traditional working-class women, since "[e]ducated upper-class women and upper-middle class women had other meahs of protecting their interests" (33). She defends the WOI by stating that the organization was attuned to the feminist movement in the West as well as to the needs of traditional Iranian women:

> The WOI kept abreast not only of feminist movements in the West but also developments regarding women's rights in other Islamic countries. Western ideas and concepts of feminism were studied, reshaped, and reworked for a traditional society like Iran. Each piece of legislation

> sponsored by the WOI was drawn up after long and detailed consultation with Islamic jurists, although inevitably such legislation reflected a modern definition of Islamic law. (Esfandiari 33)

Esfandiari's insistence that the WOI was sensitive to the need to create an indigenous feminism, one that would speak to the traditional cultural and religious practices of Iranian women, is in line with the image that the WOI tried to project in the late 1970s.

In the early seventies, however, members of the WOI went to great lengths to position themselves at the forefront of the "women's rights as human rights" movement along with their second wave feminist colleagues in the West. In 1973, the Shahbanou (Empress Farah Diba) and Princess Ashraf extended an invitation to noted second wave feminists Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer, and to the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, Helvi Sipila, "to visit Iran to advise Persian women on women's liberation" (Friedan 71).[26] Friedan subsequently wrote an article on her experiences in Iran in the *Ladies' Home Journal* (*LHJ*), unwittingly disclosing one of the major problems that emerged out of 1970s Iranian (and Western) feminism. During her stay in Iran, Friedan associated primarily with women of the elite class whose concerns intersected more closely with her own and her global sisters in the

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[26] Although Kate Millett does not mention the date of her invitation to Iran, it seems likely that she was invited at the same time as Friedan, Greer, and Sipila. In response to the trepidation Iranian feminists feel at Millett identifying herself as "American" at Iranian feminist demonstrations in 1979, she writes:

> I find it odd I should ever have been mentioned in women's magazines under the Shah, having refused Farah's invitation to a feminist meeting which others accepted. I should be known in Iranian circles only as a resolute opponent of the last regime. (78)

United States than with those of the majority of working-class Iranian women:

> My first few days in Teheran were strictly caviar and jet lag and a sense of being strangely at home. Teheran, a Middle Eastern city, seems like an American Western boom town - buildings go up overnight, international banks next to Persian wimpy stands, and no beggars. We were all put up at the Teheran Hilton where I found real Iranian caviar on the menu. (Friedan 98)

Friedan's awe-filled experience of Iran, a country notable for its wealth of caviar and lack of beggars, and her exposure to a glamorous Iranian feminism, informs her glowing portrayal of the state-sponsored feminist reforms in 1960s and 1970s Iran. Although she makes several token gestures to question the regime's notorious human rights record -- its reputation for torture, censorship, and internal corruption -- the article is, for the most part, laudatory of the WOI:

> The Women's Organization of Iran is not exactly NOW. It doesn't have to fight for anything; the Shah gives it funds beyond our wildest dreams - a treasury of $50 million, a paid staff of 1,300, with 70 centers serving women and providing day care for children. These centers take the place of "support women got from the extended family," says Dr. Simin Redjali, in charge of training Iran's childcare workers. (104)

Germaine Greer, however, offers a significantly different perspective on Betty's days in Iran and on their hosts, the women of the WOI:

> When Betty Friedan arrived at the Hilton in Teheran, she announced that

> she would see nobody, nobody, not even the shah himself, until she had recovered from the flight. Our attendants, highborn Iranian damsels clad head to foot in Guy Laroche, begged Helvi and me to intercede on their behalf: there were formalities to be undergone, briefings, welcomes. We were helpless. Betty refused to take calls, and no one dared to pound on her door. (1988: 37-8)

When, finally, Friedan considers herself well-rested enough to face the Iranian feminist world, she meets the "very beautiful" Empress Farah Diba, to whom Friedan presents a copy of *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan 99). The Empress informs her: " 'I read it originally in French in paperback . . .I agreed with it all' "(Friedan 99). While Farah's unequivocal endorsement of Friedan's book can be read as an example of *ta'rof*, the elaborate and complex codes of deferential *politesse* in Iranian culture, I believe that her comment emerges out of a specifically 1970s pedagogical feminist model. Anglo-American feminism owes much of its success to the assumption that a select group of women, donning the mantle of feminist enlightenment, will guide their less enlightened sisters along the path of progress. The women at the helm of the WOI, most of them royalists, dubbed "the haute couture" by Greer, aligned themselves with noted second wave feminists in the West and adopted a similarly hierarchical relationship in relation to less prosperous Iranian women (Greer 1988: 38). The discourse of international sisterhood, while purporting to be radically egalitarian and humanitarian, in fact reinforces class alliances across national borders.

Friedan is deliberate about including the Shahbanou's praise of her book as well as the Shah's flattery of her:

> In a few years, I can see the women of Iran in whatever intelligent and right place the women of the advanced countries will be. In a few years, I hope the women of Iran will be just like you. (104)

The insertion of these unctuous comments has a two-fold effect: first, they invoke the trite – and frustratingly tenacious – binary model of the East as traditional (read backward) and the West as modern (read advanced).[27] The unquestioned assumption here is that Friedan is one of the leaders of the second wave of feminism, and that as a model of advanced Western womanhood, she can now educate her retrograde Iranian sisters. Second, these comments reinforce Friedan's position as the woman who "is sometimes blamed for starting 'women's lib'" (Friedan 72). The article was published in 1975, a period during which Friedan's star had fallen in Western feminist circles. As the rift between "liberal" and "radical" feminists grew stronger, Friedan's homophobic, elitist and conservative vision for the future of feminism was becoming increasingly unpopular amongst her feminist colleagues. Indeed, the woman who liked to take credit for starting the second wave was being led unceremoniously away from the podium. In response to a 1970 article in the *New York Times Magazine* that described Friedan as the mother of "women's liberation," dissenting feminists raised their voices in protest:

> If the women libbers needed a "mother," many of them told [[illegible]] Wilkes

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[27] Chapters One and Three provide a closer look at the ways in which the concept of modernity has been mobilized within Western and state-sponsored Iranian feminist discourses to position women of less privileged classes and nations as objects in need of rescue and guidance.

> [author of the article], they would, thank you very much, choose their own. Betty, the writer Sally Kempton proclaimed, "misrepresents the case for feminism by making people believe that reform is the answer. . .She is not the movement [sic] mother; that is Simone de Beauvoir." (Cohen 310)

Friedan's portrayal of her warm, if not sycophantic, reception by Iran's royalty and the WOI serves to reposition her at the centre of the second wave feminist movement.[28] In a sense, Iranian feminism functions as Friedan's self-consolidating other; she goes to the margins in order to secure her place in the centre.

Germaine Greer, who wrote her version of events in "Women's Glib," published in *Vanity Fair* magazine, seems to be less enamoured of the "Empress who is also a feminist" (Friedan 100). She also appears to have a less glowing impression of Pahlavi feminists and of state-sponsored feminism in general than does Friedan. Greer, a second wave feminist who distinguishes herself from her prominent American sisters by attending to class differences, is ruthless in her description of the feminist meetings:

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[28] One of the most appalling events of that trip is recounted in Greer's 1988 article. Upon her arrival in Tehran, Friedan, an asthmatic, demanded to have a respirator in her room. The members of the WOI, deeply embarrassed by the fact that the hospital, which had only one other respirator, wanted Friedan to return it, turn to Greer for assistance. They tell her:

> ". . .[Friedan] ordered [a respirator] when she arrived. And now the hospital wants it back. They only have two respirators. People may die. She is the shah's guest. We don't know what to do." (38)

Greer promises them that she will take care of matters, and eventually "[t]he respirator was removed, and Betty never mentioned it. She may never have noticed its going" (38). It is difficult to imagine the degree of self-importance required to demand the exclusive use of important medical facilities in a country where more than half the population would be unable to afford private healthcare.

> Helvi spoke first, delivering a seamless series of high-minded U.N. platitudes for the exact twenty minutes she was allotted.[29] Then Betty arose. "The world will never be the same again," she barked. "Women want to make pahlicy, naht coffee! A chicken in every home and a whore in every putt." The thoughts poured out higgledy-piggledy, and Betty's tongue ran after them, never quite capturing one before setting off in pursuit of another. The Iranian women, exhausted after a day of having their eyebrows and hair roots bleached and their arms and legs depilated in preparation for the meeting, had a fairly slender grasp of English at the best of times. They sat glassy-eyed as the torrent of unfinished sentences raced past. If they knew what TV dinners or waste-disposal units were, they gave no sign" (1988: 38).

By the end of their stay, Greer confesses that their trip to Iran accomplished little for the feminist movement and that she had "long ago given up on the shah's tame women's association" (38). On their last night in Tehran, Princess Ashraf threw a party in honour of the three Western feminists; suddenly, Greer reports, chaos erupted in the courtyard:

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[29] Greer is vociferous about the hypocrisy of UN rhetoric on the subject of women's rights. In May of 1975, she published an article in the *New York Times*, launching a scathing critique of the UN sponsored International Women's Year:

> The decision to have a women's year was simply a belated recognition of the fashionableness of feminism in the West, whose lifestyles dominate the UN self-image despite their manifest irrelevance to most of the people living on the planet . . . International Women's Year is a simple extension of Madison Avenue feminism: The agricultural labourers of Asia and Africa might as well lay down their hoes and light up a Virginia Slim. (35)

> Betty was standing screaming in front of our Cadillac. "Dammit! I want, I deserve, my own car. Get me my own car. I will not travel cooped up in this thing with two other women. Don't you clowns know who I am?"
>
> "Mrs. Greer," said the attendants, who were shaking with fright. "What shall we do? Please make her be quiet. She is very drunk."
>
> "In a manner of speaking," I said. Betty was drunk, but not with wine. She was furious that the various dignitaries and ministers of state had their own cars, while the women guests of honor traveled in a single car like a harem. She just stood there in her spangled black crêpe de Chine and kept on yelling. "No! No! I will nutt just be quiet and gettinna car. Absolutely nutt!" After a good deal of stifled giggling, it was decided that one of the ministers would lend his car for Betty. As the big car with the flag pulled out of the gateway, I saw Betty, small, alone, in the back, her great head pillowed on the leather. She had closed her eyes to rest after another important victory. (40)

Greer's harsh critique of the major inequities within the global sisterhood movement, as advocated by Friedan, and as embraced by Pahlavi feminists, emerges out of her commitment to attending to class differences. Greer's indignation at social and economic inequalities contextualizes her within the second wave British feminist context, out of which emerged two major currents of thought: socialist feminism and psychoanalytic feminism (Thornham 38). Lest Greer come out looking beyond reproach, it should be noted that her often judgmental observations have sometimes led her into dubious political terrain, as her recent dismissal of Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* demonstrates.[30] Her account of her time in Iran is often marred by a self-congratulatory description of her own "true" brand of revolutionary feminism. After mocking Sipila's and Friedan's speeches, she describes her own:

> . . . with five minutes of our hour left to go, the leader of the world's women would sit down, panting with triumph. For five minutes, I would try to say something about the truth of women's lives in the shah's Iran in terms that the women might understand. This was not easy, as I had been specifically requested not to refer to abortion or contraception, or Islam or the passport law, against which my friend Mehrangiv [sic] Manouchehrian had struggled in vain. (38)

Greer's behaviour in Iran was perhaps not as egregiously oblivious as Friedan's, but she still positions herself as a possessor of true feminist knowledge which she generously disseminates.

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[30] According to a report from the *Canadian Press* newswire, Greer created a stir on a BBC-TV panel discussion before the 1996 Booker Prize awards ceremony. Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995) was one of the six books shortlisted for the Booker that year, and when the panel discussed Mistry's novel, Greer was emphatic:

> "I hate this book. I absolutely hate it," she said, grimacing for effect. Greer explained that she had spent four months teaching at women's college in Bombay and she had not seen the squalor and misery portrayed in Mistry's novel. "I just don't recognize this dismal, dreary city. It's a Canadian book about India. What could be worse? What could be more terrible?" she asked, laughing. Mistry is a soft-spoken man, but his eyes shoot fire at the suggestion that he knows less about life in India than Greer. "She wants to say that those four months teaching the daughters of high society put her in a better position to judge India than I am in, having grown up there and spent 23 years before emigrating? . . . Germaine Greer I understand is an intelligent woman . . . And it was almost heartbreaking that someone of her calibre could stoop to such folly and say something so asinine." Whether Greer knew of Mistry's background, she won't say. She refused to be interviewed about her remarks. (CP 17 November 1996)

Nevertheless, Greer maintained a persistent critique of the inequities within the universal feminist movement, especially as promoted by the United Nations. Shortly after the first UN International Conference on Women, Greer published an article in *Chatelaine* magazine, condemning the Mexico City conference whose speakers' list was dominated by prominent Western feminists and the wives and sisters of male heads-of-state in third world countries. According to Greer, the NGO conference, which took place alongside the UN conference, was a forum to which everyone except Mexican working-class women had access. State-sanctioned feminist discourse, as promoted by the UN International Year of Women, Greer suggests, only speaks to an elite group of women who have the luxury to discuss such issues as managing their roles as mothers and "career women."

Deploying her acerbic wit, Greer voices her anger at the spurious feminist credentials and disingenuous commitment to women's rights espoused by state representatives at the Mexico conference:

> The next day began reasonably well, with an enormously long speech by Sirimavo Bandaranaike in which we were induced to believe that women in Sri Lanka had nothing further to ask for (except perhaps a living wage for picking tea, some form of industrial organization to represent them, and literacy and a decent diet, but on the statute books they were doing fine). Well. Mrs. Bandaranaike is a head of state so there was a reason for

> her being the first to address the third plenary session. The second speaker was Her Imperial Highness Princess Ashraf Pahlavi of Iran, twin sister of the man who repudiated a wife because she did not bear him a son. That was a little harder to understand, but Princess Ashraf had headed the Consultative Committee which had worked on the Draft World Plan of Action for IWY. Besides, she paid a million dollars for the privilege. (Greer *Chatelaine* 102)[31]

Greer denounces the discrepancies between official feminist rhetoric and its relevance to the lives of the majority of working-class women. By openly critiquing Ashraf Pahlavi, Greer foregrounds questions of economic and social class, thereby distinguishing herself from her American colleagues, and calls attention to the problems perpetuated by state-sponsored feminist organizations that claim to strive for universal women's rights.

The idea of the universality of women's rights and experiences is crucial to the discourse of global sisterhood and has been actively promoted through second wave feminist ideology. In 1984, Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar argued that studies of third world women conducted by privileged white women from the West are inherently imperialist and oppressive (6). By using a feminist anthropological text, *Women United,*

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[31] According to the Shah's unauthorized biography, Princess Ashraf

> offered $500,000 to help defray the costs of the conference, $500,000 for an Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, and $1 million for an international institute for research on the status of the world's women. Enthusiasm for this last plan sagged when it was learned that the institute would be based in Tehran. (de Villiers 298)

This privilege cost her as much as two million dollars.

Women Divided, Cross Cultural Perspectives on Female Solidarity (1978), as an example of feminist imperialist scholarship, they write:

> The authors defined feminist consciousness and then proceeded to judge other cultural situations to see if they are feminist or not . . . [They assume] that pre-capitalist economies equal backwardness in both a cultural and ideological sense and in fact are responsible for the continued oppression of women in these societies. It is further implied that it is only when Third World women enter into capitalist relations will they have any hope of liberation. (6)

In her 1998 study of the unequal relations of power between white and non-white women in the classroom and in immigration and sexual violence cases in courtrooms, Sherene Razack claims that:

> '[w]omen's rights as human rights' represents the apotheosis of what has been called dehistoricized and deterritorialized 'mappings of Otherized communities and their worlds.' As a formula, it can be simplistic or complex, but in either case, what is difficult to introduce into 'women's rights as human rights' is the notion of First World domination (94).

This formulation of women's rights as human rights thus positions the West as a marker of liberal capitalism and humanitarianism against which other nations inevitably appear less civilized.

The events of Mexico City highlighted the major problems with the global sisterhood movement – and its wholesale embrace of women's universal rights - as it manifested itself on the international stage and as it played itself out on the domestic scene in Iran.[32] Indeed, the Iranian monarchy's superficial support of "women's rights" was directly related to the Shah's sweeping plans for the industrialization and modernization of the country. The rhetorical support for women's rights was part of the image that he was trying to project to the West, an image of a civilized and modern country in which women were equal to men. As the project of women's human rights was staged for the benefit of the West, much of the financial support for this project was channelled into visible international institutions such as the United Nations.

In *Ms*. Magazine, Mim Kelber takes Ashraf's hypocritical position on women's rights to task. Although she appears to support the project of international women's rights, Kelber criticizes the advantages the movement reaped from Ashraf's financial contributions:

> . . . international women's projects "benefited" from the Princess' immense fortune – stolen from the people, charged critics; the illicit gains of heroin trafficking, hinted the European press. She helped to get Iranian funds for the United Nations' International Women's Year Conference in

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[32] Gayatri Spivak's critique of the fourth world conference on women held in Beijing in 1995 suggests that the problems that emerged out of the 1975 conference on women have continued to plague subsequent UN conferences on women:

> We are witnessing the proliferation of feminist apparatchiks who identify conference organizing with activism as such . . . They often assume that altogether salutary debate in the conference will have necessary consequences in the lifeworld of oppressed and super-exploited women. ("'Woman'" 4).

> Mexico City in 1975. The government also hosted women's film and arts festivals (which were boycotted by many well-known international feminists), and was prepared to pick up the tab for the UN Women's Decade Conference in July, 1980, originally scheduled to be held in Teheran. (In late 1978, the Shah backed out of Iranian sponsorship of the conference and the UN moved it to Copenhagen, much to the relief of feminists in the United States and around the world who had protested the plan to hold it in Iran . . .) (96)

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has argued that the UN programs for and conferences on women "have produced feminist apparatchiks whose activism is to organize the poorest women of the developing world incidentally in their own image" ("Diasporas" 264 n.8). Indeed, Ashraf Pahlavi and Farah Diba portrayed themselves as the saviours of Iranian women, and as models of progressive, modern Iranian womanhood. In her autobiography, Farah writes:

> In my country, I am considered, whether I like it or not, *the representative of feminine emancipation*. My strength, the power I wield will, in one way or another, be passed on to all Iranian women. Already these women, formerly regarded as chattels, without the right to be heard, have increasingly more to say for themselves. (130-1, emphasis mine)

By the mid to late 1970s, there were a growing number of women who bristled at what they understood to be the royal women's fallacious self-representation as advocates of women's rights. On 7 July 1977, the Shahbanou was invited to a luncheon sponsored by the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, an organization for the cause of religious freedom, at the Pierre Hotel in New York City in order to accept "an award for her efforts to raise the status of women" (*NYT*, July 8). The guests at the luncheon included then governor Carey and mayor Beame, former governor W. Averell Harriman, and Andy Warhol. Journalist Judith Cummings wrote:

> [T]he luncheon at the Pierre Hotel was interrupted by a woman who was sitting at a press table. She rose to shout, "That's a lie," after the Empress, in an acceptance speech, spoke of changes by the Pahlevi regime that she said had enabled women "to participate in the overall development of their country." (*NYT*, July 8)

According to the article, there were 1,500 demonstrators outside the hotel. Most of the demonstrators were Iranian students and the majority of them wore masks to conceal their identities. Opposition to the Shah's regime was gaining increasing support from a wide spectrum of political groups whose diverse philosophies converged only on one point: the desire to end what they saw as the subjugation of the nation to a corrupt and repressive regime heavily influenced by the West, and by the United States in particular.[33] The imperialist influence on pre-revolutionary Iranian feminism was a point of contention for many Iranian women and some Western feminists including Kate Millett, who was present at the demonstration in New York.[34]

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[33] In *My Thousand and One Days: an autobiography* (1978), Farah makes a transparent effort at reconstructing the history of the Pahlavi regime, and whitewashing its notoriously repressive and violent reign. The title of her memoirs is meant to counter the myth of Persia as the land of a *Thousand One Nights*, putting to rest any questions about the indolent and spend-thrift ways of the monarchy. By stressing her ostensibly long days of work as the head of a number of organizations, as the wife of a monarch, and as a mother, Farah takes especial pains to portray her position as a difficult and arduous one, although one she accepts with resignation and dignity. She ends her autobiography by expressing her sadness for the false accusations of human rights abuses leveled against the Pahlavi regime.

> What distresses me far more at this moment is the bad reputation of Iran abroad. This adverse publicity, based on political prisoners and tortures, is terribly unjust. It is truly dreadful to attack a country and a system so relentlessly. The accusations made against us are grotesque. The smallest incident is like a snowball which, from country to country and from one newspaper to the next, grows out of all proportion and becomes an avalanche. It is just one more trial. Nothing in life is easy, not even for a Queen, contrary to what many people think. I am very busy, I work very hard, often with great energy, joy and enthusiasm, but there are also moments when I am very tired, when so much injustice depresses me. Then I feel that everything is going wrong, that it is the end of the world and I am desolate. But I soon recover, I recall the immense progress we are achieving and tell myself that very soon no one will be able, without appearing ridiculous, to pretend not to see. The attitude of Western intellectuals towards us will then be forced to change. (142)

Interestingly, she suggests that it is Western intellectuals who are criticizing the regime – and not the Iranian people themselves. By dismissing the growing dissatisfaction and anger of the Iranian populace with the regime's fraudulence and corruption, Farah reproduces her husband's agenda of censorship and silence. While he uses the brute torture and murder of dissidents in order to secure their silence, she stifles their voices by refusing to hear them.

[34] In the opening pages of her political travelogue, *Going to Iran* (1982), Millett writes:

> Farah's unscheduled visit to New York City which cost two and a half million dollars in police security, a figure we rejoiced in griping over in the streets, a picket line I joined one cold winter night with Arthur Miller, other literary folk who showed up, a few feminists who never miss anything. And thousands of angry Iranian students in masks in whose ranks I marched out of curiosity for an hour and because I couldn't find my Caifi [*Committee on Artistic and Intellectual Freedom in Iran*] friends. (19)

While Millett's political commitment is certainly laudable, one cannot help but wonder at the incongruity between her self-representation as a committed activist and her admission that she marched "out of curiosity" with a group of angry demonstrators who were prompted by a deep sense of social injustice. One can already detect in this statement a certain ambivalent positioning of herself as located

In *Going to Iran* (1982) Millett, a self-described "radical," (as opposed to reformist), explains her involvement with pre-revolutionary Iranian opposition groups, specifically her work with the *Committee on Artistic and Intellectual Freedom in Iran* (Caifi) as follows: "I am in Caifi as a feminist. And I have always wished for a greater interest on the part of feminists in the issue of Iran" (17). On the one hand, this statement gestures to Millett's recognition of the complicity of some second wave feminists with an elite group of women in Iran who appropriated the term feminist and offered a narrow interpretation of what it might mean and to whom it might apply; on the other hand, it betrays a prejudice that feminists are extrinsic to Iran. There is no room here for a recognition of feminists who already exist in Iran; feminism is represented as a Western phenomenon which must be introduced to women of the "third world."[35]

Like Germaine Greer, Millett distinguishes herself from her second wave feminist colleagues (such as Betty Friedan) by recognizing the corruption in the feminist practices

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simultaneously in the center of struggle and on the outside "looking in" as a curious but disinterested observer.

[35] In a *New York Times* article on March 11, 1979 describing the third day of protests when 15,000 women marched for their rights under the new regime, Millett declares:

> I'm here because it's inevitable . . . This is the eye of the storm right now. Women all over the world are looking here. It's a whole corner, the Islamic world, the spot we thought it would be hardest to reach and, wow, look at it go! (7)

The implication here is that this unreachable, unknowable corner of the world is an object of desire for American feminism. Millett's excitement at the thought of Anglo-American feminists gaining some kind of control over "a whole corner" of the world which they saw as "hardest to reach" betrays her fantasy of colonial appropriation and ownership. This fantasy remains unrealized, however, as she begins to recognize that not only is her presence superfluous to the feminist movement in Iran, but that it presents a possible threat to its success.

of the state-controlled *Women's Organization of Iran* (WOI) and of the Pahlavi regime in general; she writes:

> Ashraf, the Shah's hideous twin sister, went around pretending to be a feminist, her representation alone enough to discredit the idea if she were not so cleverly fraudulent; actually got herself appointed head of a UN commission on women's rights years ago. A disgraceful event in itself. Then tried to invite world feminism to Tehran for the second International Women's Year meeting following that in Mexico City. An invitation declined even before history intervened. (24)

During the revolutionary period of 1978 Iran, the majority of Iranian people from all social classes came together to call for the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime. In February of 1979, the monarchy was overthrown, and Mohammad Reza Shah and his family went into exile. One month after the revolution, Khomeini abolished the Family Protection Act of 1975 which had granted Iranian women the right to divorce under certain conditions and had restricted the practice of polygamy. Several days later, Khomeini issued a statement extolling the virtues of the veil, and Iranian women began to feel betrayed by the revolution they had worked hard to support.[36] Although a large body of outspoken Iranian women had marched against the oppressive practices of the monarchy during the revolutionary period, these same women, now at considerable risk to themselves, marched against the misogynist policies of the Islamic regime to the taunts and insults of supporters of the religious right who chanted, "*rusari ya tusari*," which translates as "cover your hair or receive a blow to your head."[37]

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[36] Chapter Three, "Scopophilic Desires: Unveiling Iranian Women" provides a more detailed analysis of the politics of veiling in twentieth-century Iran.

Into this complicated state of affairs, Kate Millett arrived in Tehran to speak at a rally scheduled on International Women's Day – the first time it was to be observed publicly in Iran. Under the Pahlavi regime, Iranian women were forbidden to celebrate International Women's Day on 8 March. Instead, the state-sanctioned celebration of "women's liberation" was 7 January 1936, the day Reza Shah decreed the mandatory unveiling of all women.[38] According to Millett's own account, she was invited to speak at the rally and to participate in the Iranian feminist struggle by Khalil, one of the male members of Caifi, who declared: " 'Kate, your sisters need you in Iran' " (25). Millett and her partner, Canadian photographer, Sophie Keir arrived in Tehran's Mehrabad

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[37] Western media coverage of the repercussions of the post-revolutionary feminist demonstrations was extensive. An article worth citing is Mim Kelber's "Five Days in March. Was the Revolution a beginning of Women of the World United?," in *Ms. Magazine* in June of 1979:

> [W]hen the [Iranian] women tried to gather for planning [feminist] meetings, they were menaced and sometimes stopped by young men with knives – religious extremists who felt that the role of Ayatollah Khomeini as the symbol of the revolution, and the promise of an Islamic republic, meant that women must return to the seclusion of the veil and the status of chattel. "We have faced the tanks of the Shah," said one of the brave women, one of many who had worn the *chador*, a head-to-toe covering, as a symbol of defiance to the Shah. "Do you think we can be frightened by boys with knives?" (90).

Kelber offers an insightful summary of the historical trajectory of Iranian feminist struggles which makes this piece well worth reading. Although the article plays on Western fears of the threat of a growing "religious fundamentalism," Kelber does manage to convey the strength and commitment of Iranian women in the face of naked violence.

[38] Under the Islamic Republic, the birth date of Hazret-e Fatemeh, the daughter of Prophet Mohammad, was declared the new Women's Day. The day of "Women's Liberation" under the Pahlavi regime was now demoted to the "Day of Shame."

Airport only to discover that Kateh Vafadari, one of the feminist leaders, whom they had been led to believe would greet them at the airport, was nowhere to be found. The trip began unpromisingly as they were forced to find a hotel on their own; after a couple of days, their Caifi friends placed them in an abandoned apartment with no heat or food and much discomfort.

To her dismay, Millett finds that they are spending more time with the men than with the Iranian feminists with whom she was hoping to work:

> I hunger for female company as much as for lunch, a place to sleep, to study, to work and prepare my speech . . . All the women are rushing about today, finding a hall, leafleting. As for Kateh, how busy can this young woman be? She might bother to find us and say hello sometime. Perhaps it is all a test, this waiting. Perhaps I have to establish my credentials all over again. And though Kateh and I know of each other through Caifi, we have not yet come to know each other. That takes time. I'm certainly aware it's her turf, however. In fact I feel *I am running after feminism in Iran*; despite their invitation, I have yet to meet even one sister. (68, emphasis mine)

This trip, unlike Friedan's in 1973, serves to decentre Millett from the international feminist scene. She feels increasingly frustrated with her position on the sidelines of the movement and begins to question her and Sophie's presence in Iran during this volatile time; ". . .should we have come?" she wonders, "Was it all a mistake, Khalil's innocent miscalculation, our own naïve gratitude at an invitation that has merely become a burden on our hosts?" (73). Eventually, they do meet Vafadari who tactfully suggests that Millett diffuse the potentially explosive reaction to her American identity by calling herself a "foreign" feminist. Since the International Women's Day rally was under attack by government officials as well as by other opposition groups who believed that women's rights were secondary to the greater question of national formation, Millett was forced to consider the possibility that she would not be able to speak at all. In response to her enthusiasm about reading messages of support from such prominent feminists as Gloria Steinem, Robin Morgan and several European sisters, Vafadari appears "a bit nervous" and drops an obvious hint that there may not be enough time: "[w]e now have a lot of speakers. . .and the program is long" (78). Her nervousness suggests a concern that according prominence to American feminists in the wake of a mass-mobilized, anti-imperialist revolution might jeopardize the future of a feminist movement in Iran.

The predicament of anti-imperialist Iranian feminists in 1979 arose out of the historical associations of feminism with "Westernization" as exemplified by the state-controlled WOI, as well as the association of the Pahlavi regime with "Westernization" since the Shah cultivated a strong relationship with the West, and with the United States in particular. Anti-imperialist Iranian feminists thus saw the presence of Millett and other European feminists in the midst of Iranian feminist demonstrations as a potential threat to the success of their movement.

The binary of Western (imperialist) feminism and Iranian (nationalist) tradition is one which has deep historical roots in Iranian intellectual history. One of the most prominent Iranian intellectuals in the 1960s was Jalal Al-e Ahmad who published a book which was influential in mobilizing the ideas behind the anti-imperial revolution of 1979. In *Gharbzadegi* (1962), which translates as "Westomania" or "Westoxification," Al-e Ahmad identifies the continuity of the European and American presence in the "East" from the period during which they appeared as colonial officers to their more modern guise as political and economic "experts" and "advisors." Al-e Ahmad claims that the presence of the "West" has continuing detrimental social and political consequences in Iran, regardless of the various roles assumed by European and American foreign "representatives." One of the exciting aspects of this book is that Al-e Ahmad draws connections between the study of Persian poetry and culture by Orientalist scholars and the increasing political and economic influence of "Western' powers in Iran; this is a connection which Edward Said brought to the fore of Western consciousness sixteen years later in *Orientalism* (1978). Despite Al-e Ahmad's insightful comments about the unequal division of power between Western and Iranian officials, there is an uncomfortably misogynist tone to his analysis. His insistence that Iranian women should revert to their roles as guardians of Persian tradition and culture is a stereotype that legitimates an oppressive nationalist discourse which only makes room for a patriarchal anti-imperialist rhetoric and silences all feminist voices in the name of *gharbzadegi*.

The feminist demonstrations of March 1979 worked against the model of the traditional, patriotic Iranian woman as envisioned by Al-e Ahmad. Feminists in Iran were seen as *gharbzadeh* (Westoxified); thus, the press conference organized by Kate Millett, Elaine Sciolino and French feminist, Claudine Moullard, came to represent the apogee of Western infiltration into the Iranian feminist arena.[39] In the midst of this highly precarious post-revolutionary period, Millett and her Western sisters in the international feminist struggle decide that the best way to help Iranian women would be to hold a press conference and alert the world to their plight. When they convey their plans to Kateh Vafadari, she appears less than enthusiastic. To her credit, Millett's partner, Sophie, remains skeptical about the benefits of staging a press conference on behalf of the very women who are not in favour of the idea (Millett 153). Millett appears unable to realize at this point, that being in favour of international dialogue between women is not necessarily the same as having the will of your international "sisters" imposed upon you – especially in your own country. Despite her repeated assertions to the contrary, Millett's relationship to the Iranian feminists was based on a hierarchical model of global sisterhood. She went to Iran as the resident expert on feminism and proceeded to adopt a leadership role in a cultural and political milieu completely foreign to her. The assumption that women, specifically Western women, "know" feminism and thus shoulder the burden of educating their benighted Eastern sisters, is inherent to the model of global sisterhood which has roots in the colonial history of missionary and early feminist discourses.

The "international feminists" in Iran organized a press conference for 11 March 1979 (Millett 152). At this point, the tide had already begun to turn in favour of the revolutionary government, but the press conference provided patriarchal nationalists with leverage to discredit the Iranian feminist movement and served as a catalyst for the anti-feminist violence that was to ensue. The morning of the press conference only three of the panelists were present: Kate Millett and two French women: Claudine Moullard and Sylvina (whose last name is not mentioned). Eventually, one of the Iranian panelists, Vafadari, does appear, but late, while the other two Iranian feminists remain absent.[40] At this point, Millett is obliged to concede:

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[39] Elaine Sciolino, now a well-known correspondent on Iranian affairs for the *New York Times* and author of *Persian Mirrors: The Elusive Face of Iran* (1999), was working for *Newsweek* magazine at that time.

> We are looking a bit stupid now; the purpose of this farce was to introduce the world press to Iranian feminists, a few international feminists being done the honor of acting as go-between – and we can only produce one Iranian feminist. (157-8)

The press conference turns into a debacle in which Millett is accused (by the Western press as well as by Iranian feminists in the crowd) of interfering with an Iranian feminist cause; others question Vafadari about the connection of the current feminist movement with the WOI:

> Another lady, very British accent, actually English and not Iranian: 'What part have the old women's organizations played in this?' I imagine she means Ashraf's crowd. 'As far as we know, none whatsoever,' Kateh answers firmly. The lady thought they organized the one at the high

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[40] The following day, the Iranian women apologize to Millett for their absence and claim they were arrested and held in custody for several hours – which is not inconceivable, but it does leave room for doubt as they had been resistant to the idea of a press conference in the first place.

> school, our rally. Heavens no, Kateh's committee did – but if this were not clarified, we could be smeared . . . 'The Women's Organization of Iran that was here when the Shah was here is finished.' Kateh pronouncing the word like a death sentence. Her hatred of the regime is complete and perfect. 'I'm not talking about everyone who was in it; I'm talking about the organization itself. It was created by the Shah's sister, Ashraf. It is abolished and there is no voice of it remaining at all.' (168)

The concept of feminism in Iran was stigmatized by the history of the WOI; consequently, a press conference held by Western women about Iranian women was doubtless more harmful than helpful during that volatile political period. In response to criticisms leveled against them by Iranian women in the audience who objected to Western appropriation of the Iranian feminist cause, Millett and her colleagues made repeated offers to share the podium with them. Not surprisingly, their invitation was refused and only served to reinforce the structural inequities within the sisterhood movement. They remained, to borrow bell hooks' words, "totally unaware of their perception that they somehow 'own' the movement, that they are 'hosts' inviting us as 'guests'" (133).

The press conference encouraged the revolutionary regime's stratagem of conflating feminism with imperialism, and labeling all feminists as *gharbzadeh* and thus as counter-revolutionary insurgents. The second factor that contributed to the disintegration of the press conference and arguably precipitated the anti-feminist violence of the following days, was due in part to Millett's politically naïve response to a reporter who asked whether it would be germane to call the Ayatollah "a male chauvinist." She responds: "Yes, a male chauvinist would be a very simple and a very idiotic way to describe it, but certainly germane." (Millett 178). Her comment was published in a number of papers quoting her accusing Khomeini of being a "male chauvinist pig" (*Washington Post* 12 March 1979).[41] By Millett's own account, she was baited by male journalists at the press conference, eager for a contentious statement from the "radical feminist." She devotes, however, an unusual, perhaps suspicious, amount of ink to correcting and explaining her comments.

Millett's inexpert handling of the question reinforces Razack's assertion that "[i]n focusing on our subordination, and not on our privilege, and in failing to see the connections between them, we perform . . . 'the race to innocence,' a belief that we are uninvolved in subordinating others" (14). By forging their sisterhood along gender lines, the "international" feminists persisted in focusing on "a sociological notion of the 'sameness' of their oppression" (Mohanty 56). In so doing, they unwittingly strengthened the argument of the patriarchal nationalists that Iranian feminists were Westoxified agents of imperialism. The press conference, therefore, prompted some serious repercussions: there was increased violence against women at a feminist march the following day, and shortly afterwards, Millett and Keir were expelled from the country. At the demonstration the day after the press conference, however, women were protected by male supporters who formed a human chain to shield them from the jeering and menacing crowd of anti-feminist men marching alongside them. Millett confesses that this is the first time she has feared for her life during a demonstration for women's rights (197). Suddenly, it seems, Millett becomes aware of the high stakes involved in the Iranian feminist struggle:

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[41] In *Persian Mirrors: The Elusive Face of Iran* (2000), Elaine Sciolino devotes one brief paragraph to Millett's participation in the Iranian feminist struggle:

> During the revolution in February 1979, women could go bareheaded in Iran, but within a month, Khomeini ordered all women to wear Islamic dress. At first, Iran's women resisted. I walked through the streets of Tehran as thousands of women marched – bareheaded – to protest Khomeini's order. Men hurled stones, bottles, and insults. Soldiers fired shots in the air. The American feminist Kate Millett showed up, branding Khomeini a "male chauvinist" and marching with Iranian women. She was expelled. (134)

Interestingly, in Sciolino's subtle criticism of Millett's presence and behaviour during that time, she refrains from mentioning her own involvement with the group of Western feminists, and her participation in organizing the disastrous press conference that led to Millett's expulsion.

> The attackers have climbed on top of cars and are haranguing us, exhibiting a page of what looks like Time magazine bearing a picture of the Shah, and another picture of what appears to be his sister, Princess Ashraf, dancing with someone indecipherable, probably one of the big parties of the Shah's ambassador, grand affairs attended by luminaries like Andy Warhol and Elizabeth Taylor. This decadence, they accuse us, is ours: we are in sympathy with the Shah; Ashraf called herself a feminist. Taunting us with the very thing to make us angry, a charge so transparently false yet an affront to our honour. "Death to the Pahlavi dynasty," we chant back. (201)

It seems hardly surprising that, especially after a press conference held by Western feminists, one of whom denounced the leader of the revolution as "a male chauvinist pig," the association of feminism with imperialist decadence would be further cemented in the minds of Iranian revolutionaries. According to Millett, she and her European feminist friends narrowly escape a violent beating -- if not certain death -- by a group of angry revolutionaries at the demonstration (Millett 206-7).

Meanwhile, in New York City, prominent American feminists such as Gloria Steinem, Robin Morgan and Betty Friedan staged a demonstration in support of Iranian women in front of the Rockefeller Center. The demonstration, they claimed, was part of a series of "international feminist" demonstrations across the United States and in Paris, London, and Rome (*NYT* 16 March 1979). Paradoxically, when Steinem and Morgan telephone Millett to apprise her of their activities, she appears judgmental of their long-distance involvement. Despite her claim to the contrary, she comes across as occupying the moral high ground. The subtext of her narrative here is that Millett is the committed feminist who is helping Iranian women by her very presence in the country and by her participation in the demonstrations, whereas her American feminist colleagues are merely performing radical politics. Millett recounts her phone conversation with Steinem and Morgan who inform her of the location of the demonstration:

> 'In front of Rockefeller Center and St. Pat, the old corner, you know,' Robin [Morgan] chimes in, chuckling from her end of the extension phone. 'And then on down to the Iranian embassy to give 'em hell – like we used to do to the Shah.' The New York battle cry; how odd it seems at this distance, a hotel room in Tehran with gunfire intermittently in the road outside . . . But how still more complicated to explain without seeming to

> be smug – the thousands of differences that separate our experience, friends that we are, have been so long. Not just Uptown and Downtown differences, but differences of half a world away in an armed camp that has swiftly replaced an uprising – all the nuances of left and nationality and religion. (187)

It would appear that, at this point, Millett is re-evaluating her previously held beliefs that international sisters can support each other across the globe, and that all sisters are bound to each other in their shared oppression under "Patriarchy." In her ground-breaking critique of the construction of the third world woman as an object of study in Western feminist texts, Chandra Mohanty argues, "[i]t is only when men and women are seen as different categories or groups possessing different already constituted categories of experience, cognition, and interests as groups that such a simplistic dichotomy is possible" (70).

On 19 March 1979, Kate Millett and Sophie Keir were expelled from the country. They were arrested in the morning and held in police custody at the airport until they were placed on an airplane the following day:

> 'It was a horrible experience,' Millett told reporters at Orly Airport. 'I have never been so terrified in my life.' . . . She said, 'We are afraid for our sisters there. The Iranian women are afraid of being arrested and for them it won't be someone saying: 'Please take an airplane and get out of here.' (*Washington Post* 20 March 1979)

Millett appears to show some recognition of the very real dangers facing Iranian women struggling for their rights as women under the Islamic Republic; she is aware, it seems, that it is impossible to equate the experiences of Western sisters who demonstrate for several hours one day outside the Rockefeller Center in New York with those of Iranian women who risk their lives when they march in the streets as feminists. Nevertheless, this realization does not prevent her from publishing a book about her experiences working with Iranian feminists whom she mentions by name, and whose photographs she uses, without any apparent concern for their safety.

Shortly after Millett's and Keir's expulsion from Iran, seventeen European women and one Egyptian woman from *le Comité international du Droit Des Femmes*, an organization presided over by Simone de Beauvoir, arrived in Iran to demonstrate *their* support for their beleagured sisters. Claude Servan-Schreiber, one of the French feminists in the delegation writes:

> At the press conference in Paris, announcing the committee, an Iranian man protested the departure of the delegation: "This is not the time." But Simone de Beauvoir, president of the committee, replied with passion: "I've seen many countries, and I've seen many revolutions, and each time the question of defending women's rights came up, I was told it wasn't the time." (95)

The assurance with which this committee enters the fray at such a volatile and contentious time in Iranian political history is galling, but perhaps not entirely surprising given the tendency of feminist leaders of the sisterhood movement (from the nineteenth-century onwards) to organize without attending to concerns articulated by those women on whose behalf they claim to be working.

This contingent of self-proclaimed "international" feminists travelled to Qom, the religious center in Iran, and demanded an audience with religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini granted them a five minute interview during which he was confronted with a barrage of questions regarding the status of Iranian women. Khomeini responded, in the words of French feminist Katia Kaupp, with "*le silence total*" (Kaupp 49). Khomeini's symbolic silence during his interview with a group of Western feminists in Iran represents, at the most obvious level, a stubborn taciturnity regarding his position on Iranian women and an active participation in stifling the voices of these women. But this silence is also, I believe, produced by the historical alliance between second wave and Pahlavi feminists. The unique position Iranian women carved out for themselves as feminists and anti-imperialist nationalists was a precarious one which they were forced to abandon shortly after the arrival of Anglo-American and European feminists in Iran and the unwelcome host of associations evoked by their presence in the Iranian feminist movement.

Despite the fiasco of Western feminist participation during the feminist demonstrations in Iran, the myth of international feminism remained indestructible. Shortly after Millett's and the European feminists' catastrophic involvement in the Iranian feminist struggle, Mim Kelber wrote:

> Not until Kate Millett, the guest speaker invited for March 8 by the Iranian feminists, had arrived did press attention begin – and only then did police protection follow. The lesson was not lost: international attention could be

> helpful to the women's struggle to keep the anti-Shah revolution democratic. (90)

Kelber is mistaken on two points: First, it is not clear that Millett was invited by Iranian feminists. By Millett's own account in *Going to Iran* (1982), she was invited by Khalil, an Iranian man with whom Millett worked in Caifi (Millett 25). Furthermore, it remains unclear who, if anyone, actually invited the French contingent.[42] Second, Kelber's article, published three months after the aborted anti-imperialist Iranian feminist movement, shows that contrary to Kelber's belief, "the lesson" clearly *was* lost – at least on Kelber. Despite the fact that the presence of Western feminists served to divide Iranian feminists and make them vulnerable to physical attack by patriarchal nationalists, Kelber celebrates the impractical idea of an international women's movement.

Indeed, the Iranian women's movement was occluded at that time in two ways: first, by appropriating the "cause" of Iranian women, Western feminists interfered with an indigenous anti-imperialist feminist movement. Undoubtedly guided by the best intentions, Western feminists tried to "direct" the Iranian feminist movement and transform the movement into something to which they could relate as "international sisters." By turning Iranian feminist concerns into an international women's concern, the particularity and specificity of anti-imperialist Iranian feminism was elided. Second, by taking advantage of the Western (imperial) vs. Iranian (nationalist) binary, the conservative clerics successfully diffused the radical potential of the Iranian feminist movement. The presence of Kate Millett and European feminists in Iran at that particular historical juncture allowed the ruling elite to argue that feminism was a Western phenomenon and that all feminist activity in Iran would be perceived as "counter-revolutionary" behaviour. Iranian feminist activists were thus forced to choose between the two sides of a false binary: the West and Iran. They found themselves choosing to support the tenets of the revolution; the choice was, of course, a spurious one, since to opt for what was seen as an "imperialist" feminism was to declare oneself a counter-revolutionary and a threat to the state.

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[42] In fact, in *Going to Iran*, Millett describes Kateh's apprehension about the arrival of the European feminists:

> Kateh is not that enthusiastic about the delegation. . . What impression will it make among people here? Simone de Beauvoir is president of the delegation, but unwell and unable to come herself. The delegates are mainly French, but also German, Scandinavian: European feminists, writers, journalists. There is the question that members of the delegation may not be acceptable. . . To Kateh, it's insufficiently political. They might just come for a story, as reporters, or as superfeminists, to colonize. I argue uselessly for sisterhood. (153)

In a *New York Times* article on 16 March 1979, John Kifner interviews four Iranian women, all from upper-middle class families in Tehran, who had been involved in the feminist demonstrations; however, during the interview, they emphasize their allegiance to Islam and to the revolutionary state. Kifner writes that, "[the four women] supported last week's movement, then pulled out when they felt they had won and when they began to suspect that anti-revolutionary forces were urging them on in an effort to split the revolution" (A7). The women claim "they have researched the Koran in the last week" and affirm that Islam is a democratic religion but some of the ideas in the Koran have been misinterpreted by "fundamentalists" (qtd. Kifner A7). This article is immensely interesting since the women are all European-educated with a minimal knowledge of the Koran, and despite the role they played in the feminist demonstrations, they make a concerted effort to declare publicly their allegiance to the revolution and to Khomeini. The terror of being labelled as "Westernized imperialists" underlies their anxiety-ridden statements of loyalty to the revolution and their resentment towards intrusive "outsiders:"

> . . . the four friends touched on a final subject: interference from feminists in other countries. They spoke of one woman in particular, Kate Millett, the American author and feminist, who has been in Teheran since International Women's Day. "I think she has no right to talk for Persian woman," the chemist said. "We have our own tongues, our own demands. We can talk for us." "She and no one else who is not Iranian can say anything that we should listen to about Iranian women," Mrs. Mirmajlessi said. "She does not know us. I do not know what she is doing here." (Kifner A7)

The anger these women feel at Millett's presence in Iran cannot be reduced to an example of identity politics; it raises, rather, the postcolonial problem of subaltern agency. The Iranian women who, in the face of impending physical violence, struggled for feminist reforms in the period immediately following the revolution were understandably suspicious of Western feminists who attempted to give Iranian women "advice" on feminist activism when they knew very little about the political and cultural specificities of Iran. These Iranian women harboured a deep resentment against Western feminists whose (well-meaning) presence in Iran drowned out their voices and forced them into the impossible position of choosing between an oppressive imperialist ideology and an equally oppressive indigenous patriarchal ideology. The feminist voices that had made such an impression on the country in those five days were silenced by the false binary erected--at the expense of the voices and the bodies of Iranian women--by Western feminists and the indigenous patriarchy.

Although a number of feminists have moved away from second wave feminist ideas, prominent pre-revolutionary Iranian feminists such as former Minister of Women's Affairs and Secretary-General of the WOI, Mahnaz Afkhami, maintain that the project of "global sisterhood" remains a viable model for contemporary Iranian feminist work:

> The disparity in physical and material power between the developed and the less-developed countries forces Third World women to withdraw to reactive positions, formulating their discourse in response to the West and its challenge. Consequently, they fail to think globally, that is, move beyond the indigenous culture they have objectively outgrown. Their discourse remains nationalistic, parochial, fearful, tradition-bound, and rooted in the soil of patriarchy. (1994: 17)

Afkhami praises the benefits of international sisterhood and stresses the need for Iranian women to adopt a "global" way of thinking if they ever hope to advance their rights as women. The suggestion is, then, that any attempt at change from within Iranian cultures and traditions is an already defeated effort. By aligning "indigenous culture" and nationalism with a "parochial" and patriarchal discourse, she reintroduces the question of temporality into the debate. Her argument evokes the concept of linear and evolutionary development, representing some feminists as less evolved than others, and therefore in need of guidance. Afkhami's article reproduces the same kind of divisive binary between (Western) global feminism and an indigenous Iranian feminism that foreclosed the possibilities of an anti-imperialist feminist movement in 1979 Iran.

Since the 1979 revolution, Afkhami and Robin Morgan—who continues to uphold the notion of "universal sisterhood" as a working model for feminist activism -- have had a close working relationship. *In The Eye of The Storm: Women in Post-revolutionary Iran* (1994), the first of Afkhami's four books, (all of which have attained canonical status in Iranian feminist studies), includes a foreword by Morgan. Her second book, *Women in Exile* (1994), has an exuberant endorsement by Morgan on its back cover. In *Sisterhood is Global* (1984), an anthology edited by Morgan, Afkhami's self-congratulatory piece, "Iran - A Future in the Past - The "Prerevolutionary" Women's Movement," claims that the Iranian women's movement was initiated by the WOI and that all feminist activism ceased once the new regime acceded to power. This view is echoed by Ashraf Pahlavi in her autobiography, *Faces In A Mirror: Memoirs From Exile* (1980):

> We had come such a long way since the days when Iran's women were almost invisible that it was hard for me to comprehend how women can relinquish those rights now with so little resistance. When I am optimistic, I think that the women of Iran have gone underground and are just waiting for an opportunity to surface and reassert themselves. In pessimistic

> moods, however, I think that perhaps our women have taken their freedom too lightly because they have not had to fight for it or go to jail for it, and that they will not realize how much they have lost until they have been effectively repressed again. (158)

Afkhami and the former princess reinscribe the state-sponsored feminism of the Pahlavi reign that advocated "top-down" feminist reform and education, a model that can only function within a hierarchical and rigid system that devalues other knowledges and other voices. With a stroke of the pen, Afkhami and Ashraf undermine, and effectively erase, the history – and the presence – of Iranian feminist consciousness and activism.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that Pahlavi feminists such as Afkhami struggled to bring questions regarding women's legal, political, and social status to the fore of the Iranian political scene. In so doing, these feminists faced numerous obstacles and difficulties as they worked within a political system that was only superficially committed to gender equity. It is equally important to recognize, however, that those women who felt excluded from the ideals of Pahlavi feminism, and its endorsement of global sisterhood, had a legitimate concern. In a now famous essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak argues that the desire for global feminist alliances is prevalent amongst women of the dominant social classes in third world countries (1988: 288). Thus, women who are placed in a position of economic and social security can afford to celebrate international alliances. The women of what Spivak calls the "urban subproletariat," on the other hand, find themselves in a position complicated by their disadvantaged social position in relation to the elite feminist groups and to the dominant patriarchal power

(1988: 288). Thus the agential power and the subject position of the anti-imperialist Iranian feminist is elided in the moment of collusion between the two dominant discourses of international feminism and anti-imperialist patriarchy (1988: 308). Through the act of representation, then, the dominant classes affirm their own subject constitution by "cathecting" the figure (and the voice) of the subaltern woman. By transforming the subaltern into an object of study and, by extension, into an object of desire, the dominant classes impede the articulation of subaltern voices.

The 1979 moment of the collusion of Western and anti-imperialist patriarchal nationalist voices foregrounds the problem of the agency of the subaltern Iranian woman. The occlusion of the subaltern Iranian feminist voice in 1979 speaks to Spivak's concern that the actual fact of utterance is inconsequential; the difficulty arises from the representation of the utterance, since the subaltern woman is "constructed by a certain kind of psychobiography, so that the utterance itself . . . would have to be interpreted in the way in which we historically interpret anything" (1996: 291). Indeed, the voices of Iranian women were "uttered" loudly and their demands vociferously and publicly expressed during the anti-veil protests, but the cultural appropriation of the Iranian feminist movement by Western feminists and the cultural attacks against the West by anti-imperialist activists converged to shroud the distinctive demands of Iranian women.

Contemporary Iranian feminists face the challenge of maintaining a forceful and articulate feminist voice in Iran. The expression of strong Iranian feminist voices can only be maintained by moving away from the dubious position of simply laying blame on the shortcomings of the state-sponsored *Women's Organization of Iran*. By the same token, former WOI members and other pre-revolutionary Iranian feminists need to recognize the diversity of post-revolutionary Iranian feminist voices. Some recent scholarship shows the reluctance of some Iranian feminists to do this. In "Émigré Iranian feminism and the Construction of the Muslim Woman" (1999), Haideh Moghissi launches a vituperative attack on, in her words, "neoconservative" feminists. According to her, neo-conservative feminists refuse to celebrate the work of secular Iranian feminists, but instead aggrandize the work accomplished by their more religious counterparts. After listing the numerous mistaken beliefs held by Iranian feminists with whom she vehemently disagrees, she brings the paper to a close with the following counsel:

> For those of us who lived through the memorable experience of the revolution, and who have watched, in horror, the devastating consequences of the Islamization policies, and felt the clutches of the Islamists on our personal lives, the infatuation of academic feminists with "Islamic feminism," and their softening tone vis-à-vis Islamic fundamentalism, reminds one uncomfortably, of the self-negating actions and discourse of the traditional left when it was thrust into the frenzy of "anti-imperialist" populism during the post-revolutionary period. . . In the writings of neoconservative, academic feminists one hears again, tragically, an echo of this same romantic confusion, surrendering, at the same time, their own vocation (and obligation) to act as critical intellectuals. (1999: 201-202)

Moghissi's representation of the work of diasporic Iranian feminists who attempt to problematize dichotomies of enlightened secular feminism and backward Islamic – or indigenous – feminism is shockingly ungenerous and didactic. Not only does she accuse feminists with whom she disagrees of lacking political sophistication and acumen, but she also denigrates them by implying their failure as "critical intellectuals."

The kind of oppressive feminist pedagogy embraced by Moghissi, a feminism that claims to instruct and to enlighten the ignorant masses of Iranian women, betrays an anxiety about her own position as a diasporic Iranian feminist whose concerns and goals are incongruous with those of feminists currently living within and fighting against a system maintained by the religious orthodoxy in Iran. Indeed, Moghissi maintains a scolding tone throughout her paper, lest Iranian women should forget their indebtedness to Pahlavi feminists. But, more significantly, this kind of feminist project unwittingly reproduces the moment of silence in 1979 Qom and contributes to the continued absence of Iranian feminist representations in Iranian nationalist as well as Western and diasporic Iranian feminist discourses.

Minoo Moallem cautions feminists to be aware of the discursive similarities between "fundamentalist" discourse and feminist discourse: "both Western egalitarian feminism and Islamic fundamentalism [are] regimes of truth with consistencies and inconsistencies in their desire for change and closure" (324). In her recent book, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of postmodern analysis* (1999), Moghissi also argues that the discourses of fundamentalism and feminism resemble each other, but, according to her, it is not easy "to draw a clear distinction between the position of fundamentalists and that of a large number of anti-representational post-colonial feminists" (47). While Moghissi collapses the position of postcolonial feminists with that of "islamic fundamentalists," Moallem's more nuanced argument aims to "problematize not only fundamentalism for – among other things – the construction of a false totality, but also feminism for its potential to construct rigidified categories" (325). In refusing to distinguish between the radically different positions adopted by postcolonial feminists and "islamic fundamentalists," Moghissi discredits the important work of feminists who are attempting to think outside the hierarchies of dominant discursive structures, and effectively precludes the possibility for social change.

Spivak's apt warning against "an unexamined chromatism" since "there is no guarantee that an upwardly mobile woman of colour in the US academy would not participate [in the reproduction of colonialist structures]" is particularly germane to the current predicament of Iranian feminists who have to contend with the discursive control of Iranian feminist narratives by some diasporic Iranian feminists (1986: 237-8). Iranian and Western feminists need to be receptive to alternative models of feminism and we need to recognize the necessity of questioning what Sherene Razack refers to as our "position of innocence," a position that elides our participation in the subordination of others and the occlusion of their voices (10). Moving towards a politics of accountability compels us to acknowledge that "we are implicated in systems of oppression that profoundly structure our understanding of one another. That is, we come to know and perform ourselves in ways that reproduce social hierarchies" (Razack 10).

The future of oppositional Iranian feminist politics that aim to challenge and subvert cultural and political structures limiting women's freedom depends upon a recognition of the checkered history of feminism, particularly of the global sisterhood movement, from its nineteenth-century colonialist beginnings to its more contemporary imperialist manifestations. Further, it is incumbent upon us to examine our own participation in the abjection and subjugation of other women. Ziba Mir-Hosseini argues that we need to be "honest about our own personal, individual motives" when writing about third world women, and in particular about feminists in Islamic states (1999: 4). Academics who depict Moslem women as oppressed and submissive, or who dismiss Islamic feminists as misinformed or duped, often, she claims present their work under the guise of "objectivity," thereby stifling any possibility of debate (4). The arguments forwarded by postcolonial feminists such as Moallem, Mir-Hosseini and Razack underscore the exigency of recognizing "how we are implicated in the subordination of other women" as crucial to the creation and development of a resilient feminist politics, one that moves away from the hierarchical model of compulsory sisterhood and makes room for disagreement and dissent (Razack 70).

Chapter Three

Scopophilic Desires: Unveiling Iranian Women

This dissertation is attempting to trace a history of sisterhood, as a discourse simultaneously of emancipation and oppression. It is also attempting to theorize the ways in which this discourse intersects with the language of modernity to enable the construction of a privileged subject position for Western and Pahlavi feminists.[43] This position of emancipated and advanced womanhood is necessarily predicated upon the construction of (often working class) Persian women as unenlightened and primitive. For the past two hundred years, the practice of veiling is perhaps the site upon which representations of enlightened feminists and their subjugated sisters intersect most obviously.

Since the eighteenth century, the subject of veiled Moslem women has occupied a privileged place in the Western literary and cultural imagination. Representations of exotic, erotic and enslaved harem women figure in the works of such writers as Richard Burton, Gustave Flaubert, Pierre Loti, Charles-Louis de Secondat Montesquieu, Alexander Kinglake, Thomas Moore, James Morier, and Gérard de Nerval.[44]

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[43] An earlier and shorter version of this chapter was published as "Bad Feminist or Bad-*Hejabi*? Moving Outside the *Hejab* Debate" in *interventions: an international postcolonial journal* 1.4. 555-571.

[44] Examples of accounts of the Orient that are simultaneously sexualized and menacing include: *The book of the thousand nights and a night; a plain and literal translation of the Arabian nights entertainments*. Trans. and notes Richard F. Burton. New York: The

Mohja Kahf's informative study traces the trajectory of representations of Moslem women from that of "termagant" in Medieval and Renaissance texts to "odalisque" in Enlightenment and Romantic texts (5, 6). According to Kahf, the Moslem woman in Medieval texts emerges as a powerful figure who occupies a high social rank and who wields "power of harm or succor over the hero, reflecting in this the earthly might of Islamic civilization" (4). In Renaissance literature, the Moslem woman "is between myths" (5). There are traces of the powerful Moslem women of Medieval narratives, but for the most part she is "constituted by rather the same gender constraints as her Western counterparts" (5). The veil and the harem enter into the literature of European Renaissance, but "[t]he veil still appears on European women as well, and has not yet become a prop associated exclusively with Islam" (5).

By the eighteenth century, the Moslem woman has metamorphosed into a symbol of oppressed, enslaved womanhood in Western Enlightenment texts (Kahf 6). Kahf proposes that "[t]he beginning of the question of liberty for Muslim women coincides with the beginning of the whole question of liberty in Western political discourse" (7). In this period, there are three significant shifts in Western discursive representations of the

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Limited editions club, 1934. 6 vols; Charles-Louis De Secondat Montesquieu,. *Lettres Persanes*. 1721. Paris: Société des Belles Lettres, 1949; Pierre Loti, *Aziyadé*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1879, and *Vers Ispahan*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1927; Gustave Flaubert, *Salammbô* (1862). Paris: Garnier Flammario, 1961; Alexander William Kinglake, *Eöthen*. 1844. London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1908; Thomas Moore, "Lalla Rookh: an Oriental Romance." 1817. *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Moore*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell and Co., 1895; James Morier, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*. New York: Random House, 1937; Gérard de Nerval. *Voyage en Orient*. Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1980.

Moslem woman; her earlier portrayal as aggressive and powerful is now overshadowed by a predominant quality: passivity (Kahf 112):

> In the eighteenth century, the Muslim woman becomes [the harem's] inmate definitively – and the seraglio inmate's lack of liberty turns into an issue in a century veering toward revolution . . . Finally, the sexuality of the Muslim woman is increasingly organized as a scopophilic experience, both voyeuristic and fetishistic . . . Now she emphatically becomes the erotic object of male visual pleasure. Such a transformation follows inherently from the cementing of the seraglio in the dominant (i.e., male elite) Western discourse as a structure which operates on the basis of teasingly concealing and revealing the woman, both delaying and heightening the male gaze through narrative technique. Subtly, the veil begins to slip into the place of a defining metaphor. (Kahf 113)

The image of the ideal woman in eighteenth century England buttressed the language of thrift, labour, and morality endemic to the middle class; these middle-class values would become part of the dominant discourse by the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. The new Englishwoman of the eighteenth century possessed the virtues of "modesty, humility, honesty, and obedience to male authority" and "comprised the active domestic virtues of the competent housewife" (Kahf 115). The late eighteenth century saw a shift towards a middle-class domestic ideology that posited the mother as the centre of the home and the moral fulcrum of the family. By the nineteenth century, the indolent, upper-class socialite was replaced by the "angel of the hearth" as the ideal model of femininity and maternity.[45] By comparing the upper-class Englishwoman to a harem inmate, eighteenth century Western feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft criticized the indolence of the aristocracy and lauded the middle-class woman as a worthy example of motherhood and feminine domesticity.

Excluded since the seventeenth and eighteenth century from the definition of the fully articulated individual in masculine Enlightenment discourse, Western women, especially in the nineteenth century, sought to include themselves in the grand narrative of progress and evolution by celebrating their roles as progenitors of their race, placing themselves in the exalted position of mothers of progress and social evolution. They used the language of the Enlightenment to insert themselves in the discourse of individual liberty, and they did so by contrasting their own position in European societies against that of their Eastern sisters in the Orient. By the twentieth-century, this form of representation was commonplace in Western women's narratives about the Orient. The most visible marker of difference between European and Oriental women was the veil which came to symbolize the epitome of Eastern backwardness and oppressive patriarchal traditions. In *Moslem Women Enter A New World* (1936), Ruth Frances Woodsmall writes:

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[45] I am grateful to Andrew O'Malley for his insights into eighteenth-century discourses of domestic and middle-class ideologies. For further reading on eighteenth and nineteenth century discourses of maternity and domesticity, see Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall. " 'The nursery of virtue': domestic ideology and the middle class," and " 'The hidden investment'" women and the enterprise" in *Family Fortunes: Men and women of the English middle class, 1780-1850.* Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1987, and Mary Poovey, *The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England.* Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1988.

> Undoubtedly the barometer of social change in the Moslem world is the veil. Where the veil persists without variation, the life of the Moslem woman is like the blank walled streets of Bhopal, India, which afford no outlook from within and no contact from without. But the Bhopal streets within the last few years have been pierced by a few small windows, very high up to be sure, but breaking the dead monotony, and one can imagine some purdah woman unseen looking out on the street life below. (1936: 40)

Western women mobilized to their advantage the popular significations of the veil as evidence of women's subjugation and claimed the unveiling, hence liberation, of Moslem women as their prerogative. In Western discourses, the practice of veiling was represented as tantamount to imprisoning women; it was enforced by the male patriarchy and symbolized a dogmatic faith that enlightened Europeans had discarded in favour of a democratic and secular system of government. By the nineteenth century, Western models of modernity garnered increasing attention in the Orient, and the emancipation of women was adopted as a viable political cause by nationalist men and women who believed that progress entailed the emulation of Western cultural, economic, and political models.

In order to discuss the ways in which representations of the veil as an unequivocal symbol of either female oppression by patriarchy or of female emancipation from Western imperialism have been mobilized in Western and indigenous discourses, my argument will be structured around two historical moments in twentieth-century Iran. The first moment is in 1936, when the ruling monarch Reza Shah Pahlavi legislated the Unveiling Act which prohibited women from appearing veiled in public. The second is in 1983, when revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini implemented the Veiling Act prohibiting women from appearing unveiled in public. My focus on these specific moments in Iran's history enables a detailed exploration of the general hypothesis of this study: that when discussions of the veil are undertaken at the microlevel with a view to examining the material conditions of veiling, the inadequacies of definitive postulations on the veil in patriarchal nationalist and contemporary feminist discourses are foregrounded. By working around these two historical moments, I will examine how these two pieces of legislation, which claimed to initiate revolutionary nationalist positions by two very different leaders, had remarkably similar effects on the body of the Iranian woman. In both instances, legal and feminist discourses proffered the Iranian woman as a visible marker of the nation as either secular, modern, and Westernized, or alternatively, as Islamic, modern, and anti-imperialist. Beneath these two polarized representations lies a desire to possess and to control the figure behind the veil by unveiling or reveiling her.

Following Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, my aim is to "revers[e], displac[e], and seiz[e] the apparatus of value-coding" in relation to the veiled woman (1990: 228). Spivak defines Karl Marx's discussion of value as "something 'contentless and simple' . . . that is not pure form, cannot appear by itself and is immediately coded" (1989: 272). She argues that this coding operation should not be understood as taking place solely in the realm of the economic, but also "in the fields of gendering and colonialism" (1989: 272). According to Spivak, the anticolonial nation secures its independence from imperial powers by reversing the interests of the four great codes of imperialist culture: nationalism, internationalism, secularism, culturalism (1989: 269/70). However, as she indicates, "there is always a space in the new nation that cannot share in the energy of this reversal" (1993: 78). This is the space of the subaltern woman who is represented in dominant discourse as "*object* of protection from her own kind" (Spivak 1988: 299, emphasis hers). It is my argument that it is through the language of protection that the discourses of feminism and of patriarchal nationalism converge to perform a coding operation whereby the veiled Iranian woman circulates as a signifier of oppression.[46] Indeed, the complicity of Western and dominant Iranian feminist discourse with that of imperialism has worked in tandem with patriarchal nationalist discourse to occlude the agential subject position of the Iranian woman. The intersection of these discourses elide the increasingly urgent category of the *bad-hejabi* (inappropriately/badly veiled) woman whose manipulation of state-sanctioned dress codes suggests that the *hejab*, rather than a mere signifier of oppression or emancipation, remains the site of a continuous contestation of categories of gender and of class in contemporary Iran.

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[46] The gendered discourse of protection was mobilized by representatives of colonizing nations in order to justify their presence in the "Orient" and served to conceal the economic and political motivations of colonizing nations. For discussions of how British and French colonial discourses of protection operated in relation to veiling in Egypt and Algeria, see "The Discourse of the veil" in Leila Ahmed's *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (1992) and "Nationalism, Decolonization and gender" in Marnia Lazreq's *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* (1994).

In order to discuss the moments of legislated unveiling and veiling, a brief historical overview of the veil in twentieth-century Iran is in order. In the early part of the century, *hejab* --which means modest clothing -- was worn by women across classes but the ways in which it was worn were markers of a woman's social and economic status.[47] Upper and middle-class urban women wore the *chador*, a floor-length cloth from head to toe, usually accompanied by a separate facial veil, a *picheh*. The *hejab* of peasant or tribal women who mostly worked in the fields, consisted of a colourful *roosari* (headscarf) and baggy clothing which provided them with more freedom of movement than the floor-length *chador*. At this time, the widespread use of *hejab* reflected cultural standards of gender roles and class distinctions rather than practices enforced through legal discourse. In her ground-breaking work on Iranian women's autobiographies and the concept of veiling, Farzaneh Milani has argued that the veil is a physical reflection of the gendered concept of *sharm*, a combination of charm and shame (6). *Sharm*, which connotes modesty, timidity, and soft-spoken charm, remains one of the most valued qualities in a traditional Iranian woman. At the turn of the century, the more a woman concealed with her dress as well as by her demeanour the more she indicated her privileged social status.

As Milani and Shahla Haeri have noted, the *hejab* was also a reflection of architectural space in the affluent Iranian home, divided between the *andaroon* (inner) and the *birooni* (outer) (Haeri 1980; Milani 1992). The *andaroon* was a realm occupied exclusively by women. The only men who had access to the women's quarters were close members of the family and servants, who were often eunuchs. The *birooni,* in contrast, was reserved only for the men of the household, their male guests and servants. Contrary to the beliefs of nineteenth-century missionary feminists and women travellers such as Gertrude Bell, Ella Sykes, among others, who travelled to Iran in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, these separate spheres did not automatically suggest that the *andaroon* constituted a place of women's imprisonment or oppression. The *andaroon* has been recognized in contemporary historical and political writings as the site of political intrigue and activism. The most striking example of the *andaroon*'s political role occurred during the Tobacco Protests of 1890. In response to a total monopoly awarded Major G.F. Talbot, a British entrepreneur, to cultivate and sell Iranian tobacco, there were large-scale protests and boycotts, but it was the uncompromising boycott of tobacco by the women in the *andaroon* of the Shah's palace that finally forced the Shah to cancel the concession (Bayat-Philipp 1978; Afary 1996).[48]

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[47] The veil, worn quite differently in a number of Moslem countries as well as in many other regions, has come to embody various meanings at different historical moments in diverse national contexts. For the purposes of my argument here, I am focusing on its manifestations in the Iranian context.

The voices of privileged Iranian women, who would traditionally have belonged in the realm of the *andaroon,* intersected with those of Western women to promote the language of women's rights and suffrage in Iran. Elite Iranian women and Western women mobilized the discourses of modernity and of sisterhood to argue for the unveiling of women and for their rights as citizens of the new nation during the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911. Often represented as one of the early proponents of progress and women's rights, Taj Ol-Saltaneh, the daughter of Nasser El-Din Shah, and her memoirs deserve some attention here.

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[48] See chapter One, "Enlightening the Other: Christian Sisters and Intrepid Adventuresses," for a more detailed account of feminist activism in early twentieth-century Iran.

The structure of Taj's autobiographical text is epistolary. She chooses to address her thoughts in the form of a letter addressed to her male mentor and cousin whom she says reminds her of members of "Prince de Condé's family, whose noses were always compared to eagles' beaks" (109). She sets up her narrative by drawing on European frames of reference, and makes frequent comparisons between her own writing style and that of French intellectuals, between the status of Iranian women and that of their European counterparts. She writes:

> I wish I were a competent writer like Victor Hugo or Monsieur Rousseau and could write this history in sweet and delightful language. Alas, I can write but simply and poorly. (134)

In her memoirs, Taj argues that the post-Constitutional nation of Iran can only achieve its Enlightenment goals of sovereignty, individual rights, and technological progress by discarding the traditional, oppressive practice of veiling and by promoting women's education:

> It disheartens and grieves me to think that my fellows – that is, the women of Persia – are ignorant of their rights and make no effort to fulfill their obligations as human beings. Completely deficient in character and unsuited for any task, they crawl into the corners of their homes and spend

> every hour of their lives indulging wicked habits. Excluded from the community of civilization, they roam the valley of confusion and ignorance. (118)

The representation of traditional Iranian women as ignorant and backward remained prevalent in Iranian feminist discourses well into the twentieth-century. In the 1960s, Badr ol-Moluk Bamdad, another celebrated Iranian feminist, echoed Taj's sentiments regarding the lives of Iranian women before the 1905 Constitutional Revolution:

> In the days when Iranian mothers were imprisoned in a corner of the house and knew nothing about rights or freedom, the Iranian children and youngsters growing up beside them had to spend their formative years in idleness and mental stress. (17)

Like their Western sisters, Bamdad and Taj emphasize the importance of women's roles as mothers for the future of the nation; "[e]very mother's first responsibility is the edification of her children," Taj opines (116).

The concept of motherhood as integral to the project of national progress and development is articulated as early as the eighteenth century by Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication Of The Rights of Woman* (1792): "If children are to be educated to understand the true principle of patriotism, their mother must be a patriot" (102). Iranian modernists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries looked to the West as they constructed a model of social and political change for the nation, and embraced the role of mothers as vital to the modern nation. Afsaneh Najmabadi has argued that Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani, one of the leading Iranian intellectuals of the nineteenth century, concerned with the creation of the perfect nationalist Iranian man, envisaged the womb as a school. According to Najmabadi, during this time in Iran, motherhood "became a mediating term between two concepts central to modernity: progress and women's rights" (1998: 94).

It is, however, the practice of veiling that emerges initially in Western women's discourses, and later in Iranian women's discourses, as the root of all the nation's problems. Taj laments the lives and education of Iranian women, and bemoans their fate thus:

> Alas! Persian women have been set aside from humankind and placed together with cattle and beasts. They live their entire lives of desperation in prison, crushed under the weight of bitter ordeals. At the same time, they see and hear from afar and read in the newspapers about the way in which suffragettes in Europe arise with determination to demand their rights: universal franchise, the right to vote in parliament, the right to be included in the affairs of government. They are winning successes. In America their rights are fully established and they are striving with serious determination. The same is true in London and Paris. (285)

The portrayal of Iranian women as comparable to "beasts of burden" is a familiar image in the writings of nineteenth century missionaries and feminists (Van Sommer 1907: 15). In fact, Reverend Samuel Zwemer goes one step further by expressing his outrage at the barbarous practice that ensures "a way by which *all* females could be buried alive and yet live on – namely, the veil" (1907: 6, emphasis his). In her memoirs, Taj includes a questionnaire from a Caucasian Armenian, "a militant and a freedom fighter for Persia," during the Constitutional Revolution (288). In response to his questions regarding the political future of the nation and the role of women in that future, she writes:

> The duties of Persian women consist of: insisting on their rights, like their European counterparts; educating their children; helping the men, as do women in Europe; remaining chaste and unblemished; being patriotic; serving their kind; eradicating laziness and a sedentary lifestyle; removing the veil. (288)

The European woman is posited as a model to be emulated here; this is a theme that runs throughout the history of the (dominant) Iranian women's movement and enabled anti-imperialist patriarchal nationalists in 1979 to dismiss feminist concerns by configuring feminism as a quintessentially Western movement. When Taj's Armenian correspondent requests clarification on the connection between the nation's progress and the unveiling of women, she makes a case for women's education and employment, which she claims would be beneficial to the household, and by extension, to the national economy. She ends by declaring that: "[t]he source of the ruination of the country, *the cause of its moral laxity*, the obstacle to its advancement in all areas, *is the veiling of women*" (290, emphasis mine).[49]

Despite the lip-service she pays to feminism, Taj cannot be exculpated from contributing to the reductive and constrictive model that positions women as embodying the state of the nation. Veiled and segregated from male public life, they represented the backwardness and traditionalism of an out-dated and corrupt feudal system in Iran. From Taj's perspective, veiling, as a religious practice, represents the incursion of religion into what the West, dating back to the Enlightenment, cherishes as secular space. Unveiled, however, women would represent a modern and independent nation moving along the path of moral, economic, and social progress.

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[49] I will address this apparent contradiction below.

Taj's lack of faith in the vigilance of backward Iranian women inspires her to launch an appeal to Western women:

> How I wish I could travel to Europe and meet these freedom-seeking ladies! I would say to them, "As you fight for your rights happily and honorably, and emerge victorious in your aims, do cast a look at the continent of Asia . . . These are women, too; these are human, too. These are also worthy of due respect and merit. See how life treats them." (285)

Her appeal to a universal sisterhood and her desire to be saved by her Western sisters is indicative of the complicated colonial history of feminism in Iran. Appeals to Western feminists to come to the aid of their Persian "sisters" characterized a large part of the feminist movement in twentieth-century Iran. The telegraph sent by the *Persian Women's Society* on 5 December 1911 to the *Women's Social and Politcal Union* (mentioned in Chapter One), asking for their assistance in pressuring the British government to support Persia in the face of growing Russian threats to the country's independence, is one such example. The women suffragists responded that though they were willing to help, they were unable to "move British Government to give political freedom even to us, their own countrywomen" (*The Times* 7 December 1911). Not only does this exchange suggest a history of cross-cultural communication between organized Persian and British feminist groups, but perhaps more interestingly, it also points to a recognition of the unequal status of women in both nations. This recognition further ironizes the predominant assumption on the part of elite British and Persian feminists that their relationship is predicated on an unequal teacher/student model.

Nevertheless, this assumption continued into the period of 1919 to 1932 which Eliz Sanasarian has described as the rise of the Iranian women's movement. During this time, there was a proliferation of feminist organizations, feminist periodicals, and schools for girls. She notes that twentieth-century feminists, whom she identifies as belonging primarily to the upper classes, continued to look to the West for models to emulate:

> An interesting feature of feminist periodicals in Iran were translations and articles about the status of women in other countries, especially in England and the United States. Some of these articles would elaborate on the superior status of Western women as compared with Iranian women. Women's rights – to divorce, to marry by choice, to vote, and to work outside the household – were constantly praised. In fact, one article asserted that Western women were two centuries ahead of Iranian women. (38-9)

Belief in the superiority of Western feminist models continued to influence the state-sponsored Iranian feminist movement throughout the twentieth century and contributed to the alienation of more traditional and especially rural women from mainstream Iranian feminist discourse.

The history of cross-cultural feminism in the Iranian context is not only one of unequal power relations between Western women and Iranian women, but also between Iranian women of the privileged classes and those of the lower classes.[50] Contemporary Iranian feminists continue to celebrate Taj as one of the great early feminists in Iranian history without acknowledging her participation in reproducing the reductive binary of the traditional, veiled woman as backward and the so-called modern, unveiled woman as progressive. At this time, the discourses of nationalism, modernity, and sisterhood were mobilized by both Western women and their elite Iranian counterparts to argue for the figure of the emancipated Iranian woman who was necessarily unveiled, both physically and metaphorically, from the constraints of Iranian patriarchal society and who would thereby assist in the development of the country's nationalist goals.

The manipulation of veiling practices to reflect the aspirations of the nation remained a powerful political tool, first used by the monarchical state, and later by the Islamic Republic. Upon his return from a trip to Turkey in 1934, where he was impressed by Kemal Ataturk's modernization policies, including the advocation of unveiling women, Reza Shah Pahlavi began introducing measures to unveil Iranian women. In 1936, he legislated the Unveiling Act and ordered his soldiers to arrest veiled women or to tear the veil off their heads should they appear in public with any form of *hejab*. Despite the violence of these actions, the dominant feminist response to the new law was one of celebration.

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[50] In *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran* (1982), Eliz Sanasarian notes that the Iranian feminist movement in the early part of the twentieth century was comprised of upper and upper-middle class women, but she takes pains to argue that the movement was characterized by the "classless nature of [the women's] ideological stands" (46). Although this claim continues to be asserted in canonical Iranian feminist writings, more recently it has been subjected to criticism by a number of academics including Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Afsaneh Najmabadi, and Zohreh T. Sullivan.

The Iranian feminist language of gratitude and celebration surrounding the Unveiling Act can be attributed to what Eliz Sanasarian calls the period of "coercion and decline" of the women's movement during the Pahlavi period. Among the factors contributing to this decline – and later cooptation – of the feminist movement was the brute force to which Reza Shah, sometimes personally, resorted in order to mute political opposition (69). An example of Iranian feminists' complicity with the Pahlavi regime was their, albeit forced, celebration of 7 January, the anniversary of the Unveiling Act, as Women's Day instead of International Women's Day on 8 March.[51]

Iranian feminists from the social elite fêted Reza Shah as an enlightened ruler who was "modernizing" the country by destroying the boundaries of *andaroon* (inner, private space) and *birooni* (outer, public space) through his enforcement of the public appearance of women. The architecture of Iranian homes altered so as to reflect this new change in Iranian social life; the structure of *andaroon* and *birooni* was discarded in favour of a more democratized space where men and women could travel freely. Similarly, the new Unveiling Act was represented as an effort to democratize gender roles by unveiling women and by encouraging mixed social gatherings at official state functions. While many women in Iran had protested the discarding of the veil, the fiction of democracy and of equal access to public space was nevertheless underscored by the violent enforcement of this law that ostensibly liberated women, while denying them the freedom to choose how to present themselves in public.

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[51] Under the Islamic Republic, "Women's Day" is celebrated on the birthday of Prophet Mohammad's daughter, Fatemeh.

Spivak has argued that "[i]t is in terms of this profound ideology of the displaced place of the female subject that the paradox of free choice comes into play" (1988: 300). The Iranian woman, at this time, occupies the unenviable position of "choosing" to accept the enforcement of legal discourse and thus acquiescing to the rhetoric of emancipation, or of being cast as an archaic figure responsible for retarding the modernizing impulses of the nation. The dominant patriarchal nationalist discourse and feminist discourses thus converge at this time in pursuit of the same goal: the strategic manipulation and control of women's social identities and appearances to reflect the interests of the nation and of the imperial feminist project.

In *From Darkness Into Light: Women's Emancipation in Iran* (1968), Bamdad describes the day that Reza Shah publicly pronounced the unveiling of all women. In a section entitled, "A momentous decree," Bamdad describes in glowing terms the effects of the 1936 ruling:

> After that day, women wearing veils were forbidden to circulate in the main streets of Tehran and the provincial cities. They were guided by the police into side streets . . . The women themselves at first found their new situation strange and startling. Thanks to the unshakable strength of will of the *nation's liberator*, the difficulties were overcome. (96, emphasis mine)

The "liberation" of women in 1936 is unintentionally ironized by Bamdad's admission that veiled women were barred from the main streets and were forced to walk along side streets.[52] Thus, rather than dissolving the boundaries of *andaroon* and *birooni*, Reza Shah in fact extended those boundaries to city streets. More significantly, Bamdad neglects to mention the verbal and physical harrassment to which veiled women were subjected as the Shah's soldiers forcibly unveiled them. Indeed, the Unveiling Act ultimately ensured women who had spent their entire lives wearing the veil would remain in the private space of their homes since, for them, walking the streets unveiled was tantamount to walking the streets naked.

In general, Pahlavi and Western feminists applauded state-imposed unveiling as a symbol of social progress; meanwhile, lower-middle-class urban women felt the acute impact of this law as a violation of their bodies and their sense of self. By becoming forcibly unveiled, they felt coerced into a state of *bisharmi* (a state without charm/shame). Homa Hoodfar's notable article on veiling provides a nuanced argument on the social and political complexities of veiling in Iran. Describing the repercussions of the Unveiling Act for the class of women who identified strongly with the veil, she writes:

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[52] Bamdad's sycophantic praise of Reza Shah's policies characterizes much of Pahlavi feminism. In dominant Iranian feminist discourse, the Pahlavi Shahs, and their immediate family, were the saviours of Iranian women; they were represented as progressive rulers who forged ahead, even in the face of women's resistance, with the project of women's enfranchisement. Bamdad expresses her appreciation at the containment of Iranian feminist activism and the state co-optation of feminist organizations in the late 1950s, by stating:

> The Iranian women's movement owes much to the support of H.I.H. Princess Ashraf Pahlavi, who has always devoted much time to social guidance with a view to fulfilment of the lofty aims of her brother, H.I.M. Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. She has given particular attention to mothercraft training and to winning equality of women's rights with men's. (112)

> For many women it was such an embarrassing situation that they just stayed home. Many independent women became dependent on men, while those who did not have a male present in the household suffered most because they had to beg favors from their neighbours. . . women became even more dependent on men since they now had to ask for men's collaboration in order to perform activities they had previously performed independently. This gave men a degree of control over women they had never before possessed. It also reinforced the idea that households without adult men were odd and abnormal. (261, 263)

Furthermore, Hoodfar writes, devout families prevented their daughters from attending school because of the assumptions of immorality and wantonness traditionally associated with being unveiled (263). State-sponsored feminists, insensitive to the sufferings of lower-class women, consolidated their feminism and nationalism along class lines with Western feminists and with patriarchal nationalists. Moreover, the discursive practices of these groups positioned women as the yardstick by which the progress of the nation was measured.

An enthusiastic description, similar to that of Bamdad's, of the progress of the nation and of women under Reza Shah is offered by Ruth Frances Woodsmall, an American woman present in Iran on what she calls "the eventful day of emancipation" on 7 January 1936:

> A number of definite regulations against the *chaddur* and the *pecheh* have been passed since this event, which will probably make unveiling inevitable. For example, no veiled woman can now receive treatment in Iran at a public clinic, or ride in a public conveyance. These two regulations will doubtless for a time work genuine hardship on conservative Moslem women but eventually their conservatism will doubtless be overcome. (44)

Bamdad's and Woodsmall's reflections on the Unveiling Act are remarkably similar in their unquestioning support of a patriarchal law that imposed its nationalist vision on the bodies of women. The penalties exacted by the act are quickly written off and the reluctance on the part of some women to unveil for cultural or religious reasons is dismissed as false consciousness. Bamdad writes:

> The majority of the nation's women had been trammelled by their upbringing with outworn ideas and notions; they had been trained, as the saying goes, "to enter the husband's house in a veil and leave it in a winding sheet." Feelings of inadequacy and servility had thereby been thoroughly inculcated into them. Now it was necessary to inform them of the rights which they had acquired and of the duties which would henceforth fall on them, and generally to prepare them for enjoyment of freedom and recognition of its limits. (121)

Bamdad and Woodsmall alike appear confident that once working-class women are exposed to the enlightened ways of their upper-class and/or Western counterparts, they will happily discard the shackles of the veil. The shared perspective of Bamdad and Woodsmall highlights a persistent problem with the history of the (Iranian and Western) feminist movement: the silence on issues of class inequities and colonial violence.[53] The imbrication of Western and Pahlavi women's discourses and their strategic alliance on the subject of veiled Iranian women were enabled through class solidarity.

Western and Pahlavi feminist discourses on unveiling women, and their representation of Iranian women's "liberation" were, in the words of Yegenoglu:

> linked not only to the discourse of Enlightenment but also to the scopic regime of modernity which is characterized by a desire to master, control, and reshape the body of the subjects by making them visible. Since the veil prevents the colonial gaze from attaining such a visibility and hence mastery, its lifting becomes essential. (12)

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[53] The configuration of Iranian women as having "false consciousness" and thus requiring guidance by their more worthy sisters is an unfortunate (and consistent) theme in Pahlavi feminist discourse. In an article published in Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood Is Global* (1984), prominent pre-revolutionary Iranian feminist Mahnaz Afkhami celebrates the achievements of the *Women's Organization of Iran* and its efforts to enlighten and educate Iranian women. However, she dismisses women's active participation in the 1979 revolution as indicative of their lack of political sophistication:

> The degree of political awareness reached by the masses of Iranian women became strikingly apparent during the antigovernment marches of 1978-79. In a meeting of the secretaries of the WOI we asked the Secretary of Kerman Province about the veiled women who had taken part in a recent demonstration. "Who were they?" we asked. "Our own members," she said. "You kept saying 'Mobilize them.' Now they are mobilized, and they shout 'Long Live Khomeini.'" Yet to this day we are all still in agreement that what is important is that they marched and shouted their will. *That it was in support of a destructive force came from political naiveté which only time and experience can correct.* (335-6. n.3, emphasis mine)

The emphasis on the visual in Enlightenment discourse, and in the discourse of modernity, leads to "a new form of institutional power which is based on visibility and transparency and which refuses to tolerate areas of darkness" (Yegenoglu 40). In her analysis of Western representations of the Islamic veil, Yegenoglu draws on Foucault's discussion of Bentham's model prison, the Panopticon, an architectural structure composed of a central tower surrounded by a circular building. Each room in the building is visible to the supervisor in the tower; however, the inmates are unable to see each other or the authority figure in the tower thus, according to Foucault, "induc[ing] in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault 201). Bentham's institutional structure ensures a self-regulating system whereby the inmates discipline themselves for fear of the possibility of being watched.

Najmabadi has argued that the discourse of Iranian modernity which advocated women's physical unveiling as a symbol of the nation's evolution necessitated the development of "a veiled language and a disciplined de-eroticized body" (1993: 510). The de-sexualization of women's bodies was necessary to facilitate the shift from traditional "homosocial" spaces to a "heterosocial" space in which men and women were encouraged to socialize together (1993: 489). In her article, Najmabadi cites a satirical poem by Iraj Mirza, published in the 1920s, in which he presents opposing images of two women: one veiled and the other unveiled. The poem describes in vivid detail a poet's sexual encounter with a veiled woman who "is described as a fully lustful participant, although she continues to hold tightly on to her veil, lest her face be seen by a male stranger" (Najmabadi 1993: 510). According to Mirza, the educated and unveiled woman does not require the veil because, in his words, ". . . when you see chastity and modesty in her/you will only look at her with modest eyes" (qtd. Najmabadi 1993: 511).

Mirza's conception of veiled women gestures to the complex representations of *hejab* in indigenous and Western discourses. The idea of the veiled woman as licentious was popular amongst (male) Orientalist writers who projected their own sexual fantasies on the East. The discourse of modernity, which originated in the West, and influenced nineteenth-century Iranian nationalists and feminists maintained the representation of the simultaneously dissolute and abject veiled woman. American and British missionaries in Iran also drew on the popular depiction of the veiled woman as oppressed and sexually permissive. Presbyterian missionaries Van Sommer and Zwemer comment on the moral laxity of veiled Moslem women:

> Not the least feature of the moral ruin into which they have fallen, is the impurity which seems to permeate every thought; so that they delight in obscene songs, vile allusions, and impure narratives. A missionary lady visiting at the home of a high-born Moslem woman, very religious and devout according to their standards, was so shocked by the character of the conversation with which her hostess was trying to entertain her, as to be forced to say, "If you talk to me like this, I shall be obliged to excuse myself and leave your house." (1907: 239)

While Western discourse portrays veiled Moslem women as licentious and crude, this representation translates into differences of class in Iranian discourses. Privileged Iranian women represent their (veiled) working-class counterparts as lewd and immoral, with the compulsory physical barrier of the veil to keep them in check, while they position their unveiled selves as models of sexual restraint and morality.

In her efforts to emphasize the benefits of unveiling, Bamdad relays an anecdote about "one of the worst consequences of veiling":

> Not infrequently women of bad character played vile tricks on other women in pursuit of advancement for themselves. For example, with the help of marriage brokeresses who had access to particular houses, they would make their way into the presence of wealthy men and get lavish gifts from them by pretending that they were the reputedly beautiful and charming female members of well-known families. Naturally, such dishonesty and perfidy often gave rise to nasty incidents. (69)

If in Iranian modernist discourses, the veiled woman conjures up scenes of wantonness and debauchery, the unveiled woman represents chastity and self-restraint. The veiled woman requires the barrier of the veil to control her sexual impulses. The unveiled woman, on the other hand, regulates her own behaviour by imposing a form of self-disciplinary control. Foucault argues:

> [h]e who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (202-3)

Because the veiled subject is no longer concealed beneath the *hejab*, she becomes fully exposed, and subject to the mechanisms of disciplinary power; she also emerges within the field of vision, knowledge and control of the seeing subject.

However, the veiled woman also challenges the Enlightenment concept of visibility and power because she

> seems to provide the Western subject with a condition which is the inverse of Bentham's omnipotent gaze. The loss of control does not imply a mere loss of sight, but a complete reversal of positions: her body completely invisible to the European observer except for her eyes, *the veiled woman can see without being seen*. (Yegenoglu 43, emphasis hers)

The threat posed by veiled women as they obstruct and frustrate the gaze of the colonizer has been addressed most famously by Frantz Fanon in "Algeria Unveiled." He argues that the French in Algeria focused on veiled women as a metaphorical symbol of the nation's resistance to colonial rule: "This woman who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer. There is no reciprocity. She does not yield herself, does not give herself, does not offer herself" (Fanon 44). While Western men and women fixated on the veil as a barrier, and its renting as a passage, to the heart of the Orient, Oriental men constructed the veil as a symbol of national and cultural honour. This honour was necessarily gendered and although the (veiled) body in question was female, its veiling or unveiling was a reflection of male honour and respectability.

In 1941, Reza Shah was forced to abdicate by the Allied powers because of his Nazi sympathies, and his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, was enthroned as the new monarch. At this time, the Unveiling Act was rescinded and women were ostensibly free to wear or to discard the veil as they chose. Whereas earlier in the century, upper-class women were amongst the most heavily veiled, the situation was reversed by the 1940s. Upper and middle-class urban women, who now embodied the modern secular state, remained unveiled while traditional working-class women returned to wearing the *hejab*. The ways in which the *hejab* was worn also changed at this time: the *picheh* or face veil was for the most part discarded, but some women returned to wearing the floor-length *chador* while others opted for the *roosari* (headscarf). Despite the illusion of free choice, there remained a marked prejudice against veiled, and thus working-class, women in professional and social circles. Hoodfar remarks:

> The government, through its discriminatory policies, effectively denied veiled women access to employment in the government sector, which is the single most important national employer, particularly of women. The practice of excluding veiled women hit them particularly hard as they had few other options for employment. Historically, the traditional bazaar sector rarely employed female workers, and while the modern private sector employed some blue-collar workers who wore the traditional chador, rarely did they extend this policy to white-collar jobs. A blunt indication of this discrimination was clear in the policies covering the use of social facilities such as clubs for civil servants provided by most government agencies or even private hotels and some restaurants, which

> denied service to women who observed the *hijab*. (263)[54]

Meanwhile, prominent Iranian feminists and Western feminists continued to forge strong relationships particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, through the efforts of the *Women's Organization of Iran* (WOI). In the 1970s, the organization came under attack by Iranian women who felt that their needs were not addressed by the top-down policies of an organization closely affiliated with the monarchy. In an important essay, Zohreh T. Sullivan launches a forceful critique of the project of modernity during the Pahlavi period and of the regime's specious commitment to feminism. One of the examples she offers to illustrate the repressive nature of Mohammad Reza Shah's modernizing programme is an event described to her by one of the "agents of development." Pari, a pseudonym used by her interviewee, visited Iranian villages in order to promote women's rights and to "modernize" rural women; the pedagogical agenda of this development programme included forcing women – who were unfamiliar with sleeping on beds – to sleep on bunk beds:

> Pari tells of how, when they persisted in falling off their bunk beds in the middle of the night, the administrators found a bizarre solution. They tied the woman on the top to her bed with her chador. The image of the woman bound to her bed with the veil in the larger cause of progressive rights and freedoms, a paradox of modernity, captures the simultaneity of modernity

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[54] The signs that stipulate the virtuosity of *hejabi* women, and notices in public places that deny service to bad-*hejabi* (improperly veiled) women under the Islamic Republic appear to be a direct inversion of, or response to, the discriminatory anti-veil policies under the Pahlavi regime.

> and its underside, of the forces of reason and their bondage. . . the image recalls the monumental hegemonic vision of Pahlavi Iran, and of the Enlightenment project of modernity that enforced selected citizen rights through repression and violence. (Sullivan 224)

Another consequence of the forays of urban-based "agents of development" into villages was the resultant physical abuse of rural women at the hands of their fathers and husbands who felt their honour was besmirched by the intrusiveness of urban women whose concerns appeared so far removed from those of their rural counterparts (225).

As was the case with members of the WOI, the leaders of the second-wave feminist movement in the West, with whom the WOI established a close relationship, have been criticized for their elitist vision of women's role in society and for their inattention to the needs of women who do not belong to the white, heterosexual, bourgeois, nuclear family.[55] In her 1973 article on Iran for the *Ladies' Home Journal*, Betty Friedan extrapolates from her experience that there is very little difference between the concerns of women in the United States and those of women in Iran, despite the fact that she associated mostly with women of the elite class.[56] Friedan describes how she

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[55] See chapter Two for a closer look at the intersection of 1970s Iranian feminism with second wave American and European feminism.

[56] In Germaine Greer's caustic account of her 1973 trip to Iran with Betty Friedan and Helvi Sipila, she paints Friedan as a ludicrous and insular figure who refuses to see or understand those women who do not belong to the elite membership of the *Women's Organization of Iran*:

> One day, as we rolled in majesty through the chaotic Teheran traffic, past women holding huge semicircles of black nylon georgette in their teeth, with a toddler on one hand and a shopping bag in the other, I said to Betty, "Strange how coquettish the veil is in Iran, and so uncomfortable and

playfully wears the veil at the WOI while her Iranian sisters coach her in *chador* etiquette:

> - They put the *chodor* on me, showing me how they tie it around the neck or waist to get work done--and how to peer around it to flirt. . . . I looked at myself, draped in the *chodor*, in the Women's Center in Iran, and realized that that piece of cloth is easier to throw aside than those invisible veils trapping our spirits in the West. My sisters in Iran laughed at me in their *chodor*, and I realized how far we all have come out of the veil. (104)

The call for a universal sisterhood is strongly advocated here and Friedan advances the standard second wave feminist claim that all women are united under the same banner of oppression. In this instance, the veil becomes a universal signifier of the unequal positions of men and women in society, a symbol that translates cross-culturally.

Billie Melman has argued that the period from the eighteenth century to post-World War II marked the emergence and development of an alternative discourse

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> unmanageable."
> "What veil?" barked Betty. "Don't you know anything? The veil was abarlished [sic] in 1936." Noone could ever say that Betty was not well briefed. She had learned the "facts" in the official handout sheet by heart. "Betty, if you would only open your eyes and look out of the car, you would see that every woman on the streets of Teheran is veiled." Betty looked, grunted, and closed her eyes again. She had succeeded in getting an interview with the shah through the American glossy that had her on the masthead as a contributing editor [The Ladies' Home Journal], and she was convinced that everything in Iran must be fine (1988: 38).

While Greer is right to point out Friedan's willful ignorance of her host country, her righteous assertion that all the women were veiled is clearly an exaggeration considering that the early 1970s were the peak of Iran's slavish emulation of Western fashions.

regarding the veil. Unlike Mohja Kahf, Melman believes that Western women's writings about veiled women in this period emphasize the similarities between Western and Eastern women, and "humaniz[e] the colonial subject" (439). The veil, in eighteenth century discourses, she claims, is configured as a cross-cultural symbol:

> Here the veil is perceived not as a divide between veiled and unveiled women but as a moving contact zone between spaces: interior and exterior, personal and political, Eastern and Western. It may not be identified as "oriental" because it is also prevalent in the West. The veil is transcultural in the sense of this prevalence in most cultures but also because it mediates across cultures. Furthermore, Western women's responsiveness to this transcultural aspect makes it difficult for them to construct their identity as colonists by simply pitting it against the identity of a nonwhite female colonial subject . . . The literature on veils reveals that the very notion of the other, or fixation on alterity as the basis for the construction of a discrete Western identity, is unworkable and probably unhistorical. (465)

In *Sexual Anarchy* (1990), Elaine Showalter also draws on the idea of the "transcultural" nature of the veil. Although she concedes that "the Oriental woman behind the veil of purdah stood as a figure of sexual secrecy and inaccessibility for Victorian men in the 1880s and 1890s," she suggests that the veil is "associated with female sexuality and with the veil of the hymen" (145). It is, in fact, the "unhistorical" work of both Melman and Showalter that elides the social, religious, and political context out of which representations of the veil emerge. Celebratory feminist work of this nature commits the error of absolving Western women from their active participation in the figuration of the Oriental woman as abject, thus sustaining the colonial creed that "the protection of woman (today the "third-world woman") becomes a signifier for the establishment of a good society . . ." (Spivak 1999: 288).

Representations of the veil as cross-cultural symbols of female sexuality overlook the ways in which it emerged in feminist discourses, mobilized by both Western and elite Iranian feminists, as the epitome of Oriental women's degradation. The abject position of veiled Oriental women served as a justification for the Western civilizing project which advocated women's unveiling as a step towards the progress and evolution of the nation. This configuration of the veil as quintessentially backward and primitive inspired the politicisation of the veil, in various national and cultural contexts, and gave rise to its use as a form of anti-imperial resistance. Leila Ahmed has observed that:

> [t]he veil came to symbolize in the resistance narrative, not the inferiority of the culture and the need to cast aside its customs in favor of those of the West, but, on the contrary, the dignity and validity of all native customs, and in particular those customs coming under fiercest colonial attack – the customs relating to women – and the need to tenaciously affirm them as a means of resistance to Western domination. (164)

In Iran, the veil as a symbol of anti-imperial resistance was gaining popularity in the years preceding the 1979 revolution. During the period of Friedan's visit to Iran, in the 1960s and 1970s, there was growing dissatisfaction with the Shah's aggressive modernization policies and with his close political and economic ties to the West, particularly to the United States.

In a powerful speech in October 1964, which became the immediate cause for his forced exile to Iraq in November of that year, Ayatollah Khomeini publicly condemned a bill passed in parliament affording legal immunity to all American citizens in Iran. In exchange, the Iranian government would receive a two hundred million dollar loan from the United States. Khomeini decried the bill as yet another manifestation of Western imperialism in Iran:

> [The government has] reduced the Iranian people to a level lower than that of an American dog . . . if the Shah himself were to run over a dog belonging to an American, he would be prosecuted. But if an American cook runs over the Shah, the head of the state, no one will have the right to interfere with him . . . The government has sold our independence, reduced us to the level of a colony, and made the Muslim nation of Iran appear more backward than savages in the eyes of the world . . . If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit this nation to be the slaves of Britain one day, and America the next. (182-3)

Khomeini went on to condemn the notorious "White Revolution" which the Shah heralded as a new era of economic, cultural and political modernity in Iran. The Shah's vision of Iran, as exemplified in his six-point reform program, was one of an industrialized economy coupled with the increasing "Westernization" of Iranian culture. The reforms of the "White Revolution," however, were perceived by critics of the regime as benefiting only the Iranian elite who had close ties to the royal court and to American investors in Iran.

In *Gharbzadegi* (1962), or "Westoxification," Jalal Al-e Ahmad launches a powerful critique of Iran's colonial relationship to the West, but he makes Iranian women the target of his criticism as the embodiment of a Westernized and corrupt state. Although his point about the disingenousness of the 1936 Unveiling Act's claim to redress gender inequities is well taken, his nostalgic hearkening back to a time when women knew their place as mothers and daughters is deeply disturbing:

> In reality then what have we done? We have only allowed women to appear in public. Just hypocrisy. Pretense. That is, we have forced women who were in the past guardians of our customs, the family, the new generation, and our bloodlines to become frivolous. We have brought them outside of the home into the streets. We have compelled them to be shallow and flighty, to paint their faces, to wear a new outfit everyday, and to run around with nothing to do. Work, duty, responsibility in society, esteem? Never--very few women can achieve these. (47)

The responsibility that Al-e Ahmad places on Iranian women as the embodiment of the nation's status as independent, dignified and resistant evokes Fanon's contention that "[u]nveiling [the Algerian] woman is revealing her beauty; it is baring her secret, breaking her resistance, making her available for adventure" (43). In 1941, shortly after the abdication of Reza Shah, Khomeini published a book in which he condemned those who "regard the civilization and advancement of the country as dependent upon women's going naked in the streets, or to quote their own idiotic words, turning half the population into workers by unveiling them (we know only too well what kind of work is involved here)" (171-2).[57] Unveiled women, Khomeini implies, are immoral, "loose" women who invite (sexual and imperial) penetration and epitomize the depraved and degenerate nature of the Westoxified soul. The incursion of Western values, culture or knowledge into the Oriental nation is configured in sexual terms and thus undermines the honour of the indigenous patriarchy.

One of Khomeini's followers from the early days explains his allegiance to Khomeini by evoking the idea of cultural *hejab*, and by extension, the *gheyrat* – the concept of male honour which has deep cultural roots – of the Iranian man:

> Before Ayatollah Khomeini raised his voice, we had lost our identity. We had to bow our heads down to American dogs that had as much right in Iranian courts as Iranians. . . You see, we had lost our cultural *hejab* . . . inside and outside. We had also lost social justice. Ayatollah Khomeini had the bravery to fight for our Islamic culture and to stand up for justice . . . . (qtd. Mackey 249)

At issue in anti-Pahlavi, anti-imperialist discourses, then, especially in the 1960s and

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[57] Khomeini's contemptuous statement is a direct response to Reza Shah's proclamation on "the day of women's emancipation," or, in the opinion of Islamic clerics, "the day of women's shame." On 7 January 1936, at the Teacher Training College in Tehran, Reza Shah told the (coercively unveiled) graduating female class:

> We must never forget that one-half of the population of our country has not been taken into account, that is to say, one-half of the country's working force has been idle. (qtd. Mackey 182)

1970s, was the question of *hejab* in its physical as well as its cultural manifestations.

Patriarchal nationalist discourses carry within them the anxiety of emasculation; colonial domination or imperial influences are perceived as a direct challenge to male potency and control. Thus, the threat of colonial powers or the infiltration of imperialist influences in a "third world" country is seen as a personal affront to the masculinity and the *gheyrat* of the "third world" man. The sexualization of the colonized third worlder feeds into the powerful and oppressive metaphor of the nation as woman who is always vulnerable to penetration and rape. The more powerful the imperialist presence, the weaker the position of the third world subject, and the more this subject position becomes associated with effeminate and weak female identities. Al-e Ahmad asserts that the "West-stricken man is a gigolo. He is effeminate. He is always primping; always making sure of his appearance. He has even been known to pluck his eyebrows!" (70). To be colonized or to be susceptible to imperialist cultures, then, is to be weak and female; women's actions and women's bodies, therefore, must be controlled by indigenous (male) cultures in order to protect the nation from colonization and emasculation and in order to prove the *gheyrat* of the Iranian man.

Malek Alloula's *The Colonial Harem* (1986) is a more recent manifestation of such fervent male honour. The word "impotence" peppers Alloula's narrative, and betrays, I believe, his injured sense of masculine worth and control. This is a text informed by the rage of indigenous patriarchy. Drawing on the work of Fanon, Alloula claims that the veiled Algerian woman frustrates the European male photographer by rejecting the gaze of the camera:

> The opaque veil that covers her intimates clearly and simply to the photographer a refusal. Turned back upon himself, upon his own impotence in the situation, the photographer undergoes an *initial experience of disappointment and rejection.* Draped in the veil that cloaks her to her ankles, the Algerian woman discourages the *scopic desire* (the voyeurism) of the photographer. (7, emphasis his)

In order to counter this rejection, Alloula claims, the photographer stages images of the harem and harem women which he sends in the form of postcards back to Europe. The postcards, he argues, support the project of colonialism by offering the unknowable Other to the West as an image or culture to be possessed and known. But while Alloula claims to be deconstructing colonial representations of the Algerian woman, he re-inscribes an economy of sexual difference and prescribed gender roles in his valiant defense of the honourable, veiled and inaccessible Algerian woman against her "more complacent counterparts" (17):

> These counterparts will be paid models that [the photographer] will recruit almost exclusively on the margins of a society in which loss of social position, in the wake of the conquest and the subsequent overturning of traditional structures, affects men as well as women (invariably propelling the latter toward prostitution). (Alloula 17)

Although he claims to be writing from a position of anti-colonial resistance, there is a moral indignation to his tone and sexual violence which underwrites this self-styled discourse of anti-colonialism.

In his putative critique of the sexualization of Algerian women, Alloula participates in their objectification through the publication of numerous photographs of women in sexually suggestive poses, as well as through the concupiscent language he deploys in describing these women.[58] The semi-clad women in the photographs, he insists, invite colonial "penetration" into the country through the unveiling of the harem. Indeed, for Alloula, there appear to be only two ways of being for the Oriental woman. She is either veiled and modest, and therefore patriotic, or she is unveiled, with "her blouse indecently wide open, exposing alluring breasts that entice the eyes as surely as they cause them to avert their gaze" (78). This model of loose womanhood presumably works against national loyalty and honour. He articulates his fury and indignation in an unmistakable way on the final page, by writing:

> The postcard can represent [Algerian women] in this way, runs the rationalization, because that which established and maintained the prohibition around them, namely male society, no longer exists. The imaginary abolition of prohibition is only the expression of the absence of

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[58] Alloula is horrified by the number of bare breasts in these postcards and obsesses about this subject throughout the text. He expresses disgust with, in his view, the lascivious Western photographer who is presumably responsible for unveiling and undressing Algerian women. Despite his moral indignation at the way in which these women have been manipulated and objectified, he spends much time analyzing and cataloguing Algerian breasts for our critical appreciation. He offers three categories of breast imagery: "the 'artistic' variant. . . The second variant could be characterized as that of *roguish distraction*. . . [a]nd the third variant could be familiarly called that of the *display*" (Alloula 106). It is unnecessary, I believe, to elaborate on the detailed descriptions he offers of each category. The point here is to gesture to Alloula's own complicity in further representing, "analyzing," and attempting to own Algerian women's bodies.

> this male society, that is, the expression of its defeat, its irremediable rout. (122).

Alloula's greatest fear appears to be the emasculation of the Algerian man. Throughout the text, he suggests that the Algerian women in these photographs are too passive and inviting. The only hope for resistance against colonial rule and domination is by re-inserting a strong, *protective* male presence into the predominantly female communities represented on the postcards. The looming threat of emasculation in Algerian national politics and culture is emphasized at the end of the text, by the very last word: "impotence" (122). This word appears to encapsulate, for Alloula, the horrifying ramifications of colonial penetration and dominance.

The positioning of (unveiled or veiled) women as embodying the state of the nation is a typical motif in anti-colonial writings. Of women's unveiling promoted by the French in Algeria, Fanon writes:

> Every rejected veil disclosed to the eyes of the colonialists horizons until then forbidden, and revealed to them, piece by piece, *the flesh of Algeria laid bare*. The occupier's aggressiveness, and hence his hopes, multiplied ten-fold each time a new face was uncovered . . . . Every veil that fell, every body that became liberated from the traditional embrace of the haik, every face that offered itself to the bold and impatient glance of the occupier, was a negative expression of the fact that Algeria was beginning to deny herself and was accepting the rape of the colonizer. (42, emphasis mine)

Fanon thus posits the claim that a woman's attitude towards her nation can be assessed by her decision to wear or to discard the veil. On 16 May 1958, French generals in Algeria staged a public spectacle of the unveiling of Algerian women by French women (Lazreq 135). According to Marnia Lazreq, the staged unveiling of Algerian women "was the expression of French colonial men's deep-seated erotic obsession *and* French women's frustration with native women" (136, emphasis hers). Fanon claims that the women who were unveiled were generally among the more marginalized:

> Servants under the threat of being fired, poor women dragged from their homes, prostitutes, were brought to the public square and *symbolically* unveiled to the cries of "*Vive l'Algerie française*!" (62, emphasis his)

Both Fanon and Alloula are emphatic in their claims that the unveiled women on 16 May and the photographs of semi-clad women on colonial postcards are prostitutes or disenfranchised women. The concept of male honour is important here, but of equal importance is the fact that women's bodies become manifestations of colonial oppression, anti-colonial liberation, or tyrannical patriarchal ideals.

In the Iranian context, Al-e Ahmad's desire to dispense with the image of what was generally referred to as the (unveiled) "painted doll of the Pahlavi regime" was motivated by his desire to return to the feminine concept of *sharm*. The quality of feminine charm and shame, embodied by the veiled woman, would restore the *gheyrat* of the Iranian man whose honour has been besmirched by the presence of the Westoxified woman. Ali Shariati, an influential Shi'ite modernist of the 1970s, built upon Al-e Ahmad's Westoxification argument by criticizing the new Iranian woman in her support of capitalism. The Westoxified woman enabled the capitalist agenda in two ways: first, as a sexualized object under the Pahlavi regime, she distracted the working man from class revolt; second, her dependency on cosmetics and fashion transformed her into the quintessial capitalist consumer (Paidar 180). Shariati thus offered the figure of Fatemeh, the Prophet Mohammad's daughter, as an alternative and superior (veiled) role model for Iranian women (Paidar 181). Fatemeh signified all that was desirable in an Iranian woman: she was shy, modest and chaste; in other words, she was a woman with *sharm.* More importantly, her *sharm* was now politicized as an anti-capitalist, anti-Pahlavi, anti-Western position.

As a symbolic manifestation of growing discontent with the Shah's regime, many secular, middle-class women who had never before worn the veil, but were attracted by Shariati's charismatic speeches, chose to adopt some form of *hejab* (modest clothing) and to emulate Shariati's Fatemeh as a visible sign of their dissatisfaction with social, political, and economic affairs in Iran. This move did not go unnoticed by prominent Iranian feminists. In a *New York Times* article of 30 July 1977, the Minister of State for Women's Affairs and the Secretary General of the WOI, Mahnaz Afkhami, offers the idea of a "spiritual revivalism" in response to journalist Marvine Howe's observation that "[m]ore and more women are seen on the streets of this Middle Eastern capital [Tehran] wearing the chaddour, a long enveloping veil, in what looks like a women's backlash" (20). Aware of the implications of a growing opposition to the feminist rhetoric of the WOI, Afkhami is quick to promote herself as an example of an Iranian woman who manages to balance her feminist ideas with her Islamic faith:

> "I found it in myself," the 36-year-old Minister said, speaking of her own experience with religion. She said that last spring she had visited the Islamic holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia and shrines in Iraq. "The experience would have been impossible for me five years ago," she said. "There seems to be a need for religion, as if we have moved too fast in a direction that is not native to us," Mrs. Afkhami said. She calls it a revival "against emptiness" and compares it with spiritual trends among young Americans, such as the interest in Zen Buddhism. (Howe 20)

The article is fascinating in the way that it exposes an underlying sense of panic that the WOI, and by extension the Pahlavi regime, felt with regard to their own vulnerability as members of the ruling class in a politically unstable time. It appeared just weeks after Iranian student demonstrations in New York City against what the protesters saw as the Shahbanou's fraudulent self-representation as a champion of women's rights.[59] Afkhami recognizes that in order to contain the discontent of the growing numbers of people, she must, as Minister of State for Women's Affairs, distance herself and the WOI from the image of feminism as a wholly Western phenomenon divorced from Iranian cultural traditions. As Sandra Mackey writes, in 1978 the Shah "tried to restore some of the royal family's Islamic credentials. Empress Farah went on pilgrimage to Mecca and the Shah touted the amount of money he had spent on the beautification of the shrine at Mashhad" (Mackey 280). The Shah and his coterie's re-invention of themselves as devout Moslems was a politically savvy move, but one to which they resorted too late, since by July of 1977, the political winds were already blowing in another direction.

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[59] See chapter Two for more details.

By the late 1970s, the anti-Shah movement had gained in popularity and force across social classes in Iran. Contrary to general Western perceptions that the 1979 revolution was Islamic, it was supported and enabled by Iranians who held radically different political and national visions but who came together in their one shared desire: the overthrow of the Shah. In the late 1970s, revolutionary women moved away from the model of the modest Fatemeh and chose to adopt her daughter, Zeynab, as the new female role model. The popular narrative surrounding the figure of Zeynab was of an aggressive, militant warrior who reputedly divorced her husband so that she could devote her energies to the Shi'ite cause by fighting the Sunni forces (Paidar 218). That this figure was embraced as a symbol of women's agency rather than of Islamic piety is evident by women's prompt removal of *hejab,* which they had worn only as a symbol of anti-Pahlavi protest, after the Shah's departure in January of 1979.

However, one month after the revolution in March of 1979, revolutionary leader Ayatollah Khomeini announced that "women should not be naked in these Islamic ministries. There is nothing wrong with women's employment but they should be dressed according to Islamic standards" (Jaynes 1979). Once again, women took to the streets in five consecutive days of feminist demonstrations, only this time they were unveiled. Renowned second wave feminist Kate Millett went to Iran at this point to lend support to her Iranian sisters. Once again, the veil was adopted as a universal feminist cause by Western women, but in contrast to Friedan's 1975 representation of the veil as a cross-cultural phenomenon, the *hejab* was now reconfigured as belonging to a space of incommensurable difference from the West. Upon her arrival in Tehran airport in March of 1979, a horrified Millett proclaims:

> The first sight of them was terrible. Like black birds, like death, like fate, like everything alien. Foreign, dangerous, unfriendly. There were hundreds of them, specters crowding the barrier, waiting their own. A sea of chadori, the long terrible veil, the full length of it, like a dress descending to the floor, *ancient*, powerful, annihilating us. (49, emphasis mine)

Millett's aversion to the sight of veiled Iranian women situates the veil in a time and space of radical Otherness. By deploying temporal terms of progress and regression, she reinserts the discourse of modernity into the debate. In so doing, she is speaking out of a long discursive tradition of Western women's representation of their Eastern sisters as existing in an earlier, a more primitive temporal order. In 1936, Woodsmall declared that the principal difference between the cultures of the East and West centre on "the position of woman" (39). While Western cultures offer a "unified" culture in which men and women occupy the same realm, Eastern cultures enforce a distinction between the worlds of men and women by placing women behind the veil and in the home. Woodsmall then provides an explanation for these radical differences:

> This present unified basis of Western society is undoubtedly *the result of evolution* as the Western world of the twentieth century is very different from the Western world of the Middle Ages, especially in regard to the position of women . . . The Islamic world with its integrated system of

> religion and society, has preserved with little if any variation, the social customs of the seventh century. *Between the social practices of the East and of the West, there has always been until recently the cleavage of centuries*. (1936: 39, emphasis mine)

Thus Millett's denial of temporal coevalness to the veiled Iranian woman belongs to a discursive tradition in which, to paraphrase Said, the Orient becomes Orientalized through its radical difference from the West (Said 3). If the veiled woman represents a primitive seventh-century Islamic tradition of female enslavement, then the image of the independent, emancipated, unveiled woman serves as the projected fantasy of Western and privileged Iranian women.

The language of Millett and the contingent of European feminists who arrived in Iran in 1979 to support their beleaguered Iranian sisters was framed within the rhetoric of oppression and emancipation and provided fodder for anti-imperialist patriarchal nationalists who saw the presence of Western feminists as an opportunity to advance their arguments about Western imperialism and the Westoxification of the nation. In turn, they offered a vision of independence and emancipation through anti-Western nationalist discourse. Spivak has argued that:

> [i]mperialism's (or globalization's) image as the establisher of the good society is marked by the espousal of the woman as *object* of protection from her own kind. How should one examine this dissimulation of patriarchal strategy, which apparently grants the woman free choice as *subject*? (1999: 291, emphasis hers)

The presence of Western feminists in Iran forced a larger wedge between feminist discourse and nationalist discourse especially in the context of the WOI's historical association with Western feminism. Iranian women were forced to choose allegiances at that time, but again it was a spurious choice since to declare oneself a feminist was to declare oneself a member of the 'counter-revolutionary' Westernized elite who were purportedly at the root of all the nation's problems. This moment of cross-cultural feminism was overdetermined by the colonial history of the international feminist project, and the figure of the anti-imperialist feminist subject was elided and displaced in the cross-fire between dominant patriarchal nationalist discourse and dominant Western and Pahlavi feminist discourse.

By 1980, the Islamic Republic passed a regulation prohibiting unveiled women from working in offices. In 1983, the Veiling Act was ratified and the penalty for women appearing unveiled in any public space was seventy-four lashes with a whip. This law was presented in the language of women's emancipation once again: their emancipation from their status as sexualized objects under the Pahlavi regime. The Veiling Act claimed to facilitate a more professional work space where women could work alongside men without fear of sexual harassment. This argument implicitly suggested the symbolic reconfiguration of Iranian architectural space: the literal boundaries of *andaroon* and *birooni* were dissolved because women could venture anywhere as long as they remained veiled. As with the 1936 Unveiling Act, this was a fallacious argument because the requirement of veiling was applied to all public spaces and forced gender segregation on public transport, in government offices, on beaches and even on the streets, as only men and women who were related could be seen together in public.

The debates on the subject of *hejab* in Iran remain as divisive and oppositional now as those arising from the 1936 and 1983 legislations. It has been especially true of the post 1979 revolutionary period that Western women's, as well as some diasporic Iranian women's, representations of veiled Iranian women has been, for the most part, unequivocally associated with oppression.[60] In Susan Faludi's 1991 best-seller, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, she criticizes what she perceives to be a backlash against feminism in the popular media. She also suggests that outspoken second wave feminists have tempered their arguments in the face of the anti-feminist sentiment of the 1990s. Faludi offers Germaine Greer as one such example and accuses her of celebrating the ultimate symbol of female oppression: the *chador*:

> Formerly the media's favourite as a flamboyant advocate of sexual

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[60] A fairly recent example of Western feminist configurations of the *hejab* as the ultimate sign of women's subjugation can be found in Merle Hoffman's "Iran: Notes from the Interior." Hoffman, editor-in-chief of the feminist magazine, *On the Issues*, travelled to Iran in 1998 and described her experience of wearing the mandatory *hejab*:

> From the very beginning, Iran challenged my vanity. In order to conform to Islamic hijab, I was expected to cover my hair and neck, wear a long, loose dress, dark stockings or trousers, and forego cosmetics in public . . .The scarf made my long hair, which is so much a part of my female self and self-definition situationally unavailable to me. I felt neutered, de-sexualized. But that was the point. The associations I began making were brutal: Auschwitz, where the first thing done to the women – before the dogs and the gas – was to shave their heads in an attempt to dehumanize them; female collaborators during World War II being shamed by having their heads shaved. (2)

Hoffman does moderate her tone by the end of her article and acknowledges that her visit helped her re-think some of her pre-conceived notions about women's oppression in Iran. Nevertheless, the associations she makes between veiled Iranian women and Holocaust victims seem, at the very least, inappropriate.

> emancipation . . . Greer now championed arranged marriages, chastity, and the chador, and named as her new role model the old-fashioned peasant wife, happily confined to kitchen and nursery and happily concealed under her chador. (Faludi 320)

In fact, Greer makes no such claims. She does, however, offer a perspective on the *chador* that recognizes the complexities of the issue, thus distancing herself from dominant feminist discourses of the time; she writes:

> When the shah of Persia outlawed the veil in 1937 [sic], he did not so much liberate his people as announce their dependency upon the West. Older women, humiliated by the possibility that soldiers might tear off their veils in the street, made themselves prisoners in their own houses. Gradually a version of the veil re-established itself; peasant women marked the rise in their status when their husbands gained work in the cities by assuming a lighter and more coquettish version of the chador, nowadays replaced in revolutionary Iran by the old heavy chador or the unbecoming uniform of Islamic Marxism, which confers upon young women the aspect of military nuns. (123)

Rather than celebrating the Unveiling Act as a moment of women's liberation, Greer recognizes it for what it was: a state-enforced legislation that aimed to enforce, through the use of brute force, a particular vision of national modernity on women's bodies.

There is a substantial body of work on the veil in the diasporic Iranian feminist community but, with a few exceptions, most of these arguments tend to fall back on the discourse of the veil as oppressive.[61] Haideh Moghissi has queried, " . . . in whose interests is it, except the present-day champions of the reveiling of Iranian women, to present unveiling in Iran as a concocted colonialist ploy, executed by the local, Westoxicated modernizer, Reza Shah?" (1999: 88). The question implies that those who voice concerns about the misogynist and self-serving policies of the Pahlavi regime can be dismissed merely as dogmatic "Islamic fundamentalists." Moghissi's dismissal of dissenting voices serves to silence debate on the future of Iranian feminism.[62]

Another example of work that configures the veil as inherently oppressive is "The Veiled Threat," an article on the situation of women in contemporary Iran, published in *The New Republic*, by Azar Nafisi. This piece came out of a talk delivered at the second biennial Society for Iranian Studies conference in Washington D.C. in May 1998. Nafisi's argument is structured around Edgar Degas' painting, *Dancers Practicing at the Bar*, reproduced in an art book published in Iran. The dancers, according to Nafisi, are absent in this reproduction as they have been airbrushed out in order to satisfy the Islamic Republic's censors. She argues that this is indicative of the ways in which women have been rendered invisible due to the repercussions of state-enforced veiling. However, Nafisi suggests, by virtue of their absence from the public space, these women have become more fully present. The article plays off the tensions of modernity and tradition, progress and backwardness, as she waxes nostalgic about the disappearance of early

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[61] For more nuanced analyses that move beyond these binaries see recent work by Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Afsaneh Najmabadi, and Zohreh T. Sullivan.
[62] For more on current debates between contemporary Iranian feminists, see chapter Two.

Iranian feminists, who devoted their energies to emancipating women, in the collective national memory. Nafisi sets up a binary of state versus society as she grapples with the effects of the 1983 Veiling Act. While she acknowledges the various forms of women's resistance to *hejab*, she tends to universalize the stance of Iranian women with respect to the veil as one of unilateral resistance to a universally recognized oppressive legislation. I would like to suggest that as long as we persist in the belief that the *hejab* is in and of itself oppressive, we remain in a stalemate. In contemporary Iran, the *hejab* is the site upon which issues of class, gender, and nationalism are continuously contested, negotiated, and re-thought. To illustrate this point, I would like to examine briefly the current effects of legislated *hejab* in Iran with regard to the traditional space of the *andaroon* and the figure of the bad-*hejabi* woman.

The Veiling Act has ensured yet another reconfiguration of Iranian architecural space. Due to the strict enforcement of public segregation and veiling, the *andaroon* has taken over the entire space of private homes. In memory of its past political role such as in the 1890 Tobacco Protests, the Iranian middle-class home or *andaroon* has become one of the sites of resistance to the regime by facilitating such illegal activities as drinking, dancing, and the viewing of smuggled Western videos. Christiane Bird, the daughter of American missionaries, recently returned to Iran where she lived as a child. Like many travel writers since the 1979 revolution, she was struck by the ways in which Iranian men and women managed to live their lives through myriad contradictions:

> Every Iranian lives in two worlds – the public and the private. The public is for wearing dark colors, obeying the laws of the Islamic society, and

> generally presenting a serious and pious face to the world. The private is for wearing bright colors, laughing and socializing with family and friends, and quiet contemplation and prayer. Among some Iranians, most notably the middle and upper classes of north Tehran and other large cities, the private is also for enjoying forbidden music and literature, watching banned videos and TV shows, wearing miniskirts and halter tops, drinking alcohol and doing drugs, and criticizing the Islamic government. (Bird 51)

Many others have commented on the schizophrenic nature of Iranian society developed as a result of excessive state-imposed codes of behaviour. Canadian travel writer Alison Wearing describes her burgeoning friendship with a young man whose entrepreneurial spirit has led him to a lucrative drug dealing operation out of his trendy Tehran apartment (180). She appears fascinated by his ability to navigate his way through the elaborate cultural codes expected of him through tradition, the stringent social codes imposed on him through state legislation, and the stealth required of him in his covert traffic in opium, a profitable venture enabling him to maintain his fashionable lifestyle. But as CNN reporter Christiane Amanpour's documentary on Iran (discussed later in the chapter) indicates, the private space of Iranian homes are the site not only of drug deals but of surreptitious sales of boot-leg Hollywood movies.

As was the case in 1936, the boundaries of *andaroon* and *birooni* have been displaced onto city streets but with different results so that public parks and ski slopes in northern Tehran are now renowned for accommodating surreptitious meetings between teenagers who defy the wrath of the Islamic Republic by arranging social excursions in groups or as couples. Veteran *New York Times* foreign correspondent Elaine Sciolino describes the complexities of private and public spaces, and the ways in which Iranians are continuously reconfiguring the two realms:

> Iranians . . . find refuge in the great outdoors, especially in the three small mountains north of Tehran. . . . all use the mountains as a place of release, beyond the watchful eye of the Islamic Republic . . . A young Iranian woman I know goes camping with a coed group of friends in mountains where the police do not go . . . For days, they sleep in tents and cook food over campfires. It is an act both of liberation and desperation. In reality, the mountains are not private at all, and if the campers were to be caught, they could be arrested, fined, and perhaps lashed. But the longing to feel free makes it worth the risk. (106)

Consequently, although the effects of legislated veiling were intended to demarcate private and public domains, many Iranians are subverting the rigidity of these categories by redefining and relocating these spaces.

An important factor that has been elided in discussions of the *hejabi* (veiled) and *bi-hejabi* (unveiled) in Iran is the category of the *bad-hejabi*. By draping a *roosari* (headscarf) around her head in creative ways, teasing out a lock of dyed blond hair, wearing various shades of lipstick and sporting fashionably tailored *manteaus* (overcoats), the compelling figure of the middle-class *bad-hejabi* woman draws attention to her body. By manipulating state-sanctioned dress codes to flaunt the regime, she simultaneously displays her class privilege by the quality and style of *manteau* that she wears and the designer scarf she drapes over her semi-concealed hair. In a useful and thought-provoking essay, Ziba Mir-Hosseini argues that the enforcement of *hejab* has paradoxically "empowered those whom it was meant to restrain: Westernised middle-class women" (1996: 157). While I remain dubious about the empowering effects of state-legislated veiling or unveiling, I agree with Mir-Hosseini that this particular class of women effectively manipulates the terms of the legislation to display resistance to the regime. By mocking and parodying the form of modest dress that the state imposes on women, the *bad-hejabi* threaten one of its most important political aims. The rhetoric of revolutionary days and of the revolutionary government championed the *mostazaf,* the downtrodden poor. The government's aim was to redistribute the wealth of the country and one of the ways they sought to do so was by forcing women to wear *hejab,* thereby concealing the inequalities of wealth and class in the country. The distinctive ways in which women are increasingly choosing to wear *hejab* presents a brazen challenge to the Islamic Republic's self-proclaimed efforts to redress social and economic inequalities.

The *bad-hejabi* pose a challenge to the regime's self-described politics of economic and social equality, but they also defy the regime's enforcement of female chastity and morality by artfully testing the limits of *hejab*. In her analysis of Western representations of veiling, Yegenoglu writes:

> The veil gives rise to a meditation: if they wear a mask, or masquerade or conceal themselves, then there must be a behind-the-mask, a knowledge that is kept secret from us. The *mystery* that is assumed to be concealed by

> the veil is *unconcealed* by giving a figural representation to this mask and to the act of masquerading as an enigmatic figure. However, what is thus unconcealed, i.e. the "masquerade," the "veil," is the *act of concealment* itself. . . This metaphysical speculation or mediation, this desire to reveal and unveil is at the same time the *scene of seduction*. The metaphysical will to know gains a sexual overtone. (44-5, emphasis hers)

It is the erotic aspect of veiling that the *bad-hejabi* exploit and manipulate to subvert the purpose of state-legislated *hejab* which claims to equalize all women in terms of class and sexuality. In fact, the *bad-hejabi* have managed, through fashionable adaptations of the *hejab*, to challenge both the concepts of economic equality and of sexual neutrality. Not only do they tempt the scopophilic gaze by the provocative ways in which they wear *hejab* in public, but private homes have become the site of suggestive unveiling and sexual allusions. Upon arriving at a party in affluent north Tehran, Bird is startled to find that:

> [a]ll around [her] were gorgeous young women, dressed in revealing T-shirts or tube tops, and slinky blank pants, black miniskirts, or tight blue jeans. Some had long elaborately curled hair and most were wearing a light layer of makeup. All in all, they looked much like fashionable young women in the United States. (Bird 53)

While in Tehran, Sciolino visits an aerobics studio in the affluent north and is treated to an impromptu dance performed by the instructor for the viewing pleasure of the women in attendance:

> Ladan was dressed in a low-cut belly shirt, tight red and white paisley pedal pushers, big gold hoop earrings, and athletic shoes. But the dance she chose was pure Persian. She turned down the lights and put on the sinuous music. She thrust our her small breasts, revealing her slightly rounded belly and her navel, threw back her head, and put her arms over her head. She parted her wide lips in what I can only describe as an orgasmic smile. Then she moved, swaying and undulating her way around the room. She outlined the curves of her body with her hands and beckoned the audience to her. It was a moment of sheer sensuality like others I have been invited to see from time to time in Iran. Men can be wonderfully erotic when they show their skills in traditional dances that have survived, despite the Islamic Republic. But for women, there is an additional dimension of freedom. So much of a woman's body is covered in public, so much is forbidden and repressed, that when the veil falls, even for a moment, there is a heightened sense of excitement. (Sciolino 95)

Although this passage attempts to challenge contemporary stereotypes of the veiled woman as desexualized and abject, it does so by evoking the recognizable eighteenth and nineteenth-century Orientalist fantasies about the Orient. Ironically, by attempting to subvert state legislation through a mockery of its emphasis on morality, the *bad-hejabi* invoke Orientalist representations of the East as a site of endless sexual possibilities and of veiled women as sensual and insatiable objects of desire.

In July 1999, the television program *National Geographic Explorer* aired an episode entitled, "Iran: Behind the Veil." The show follows photographer Alexandra Avakian through the country as she, according to the narrator, "capture[s] an Iran few Westerners know about or have ever seen." Avakian establishes her Middle Eastern pedigree by mentioning an Iranian grandfather, but takes pains to ensure that her audience will recognize her as American. In other words, she is just "Other" enough to represent her subject authoritatively, and at the same time familiar enough not to alienate her audience.

Central to the documentary is footage of women, black stripes over their eyes to conceal their identities, modelling clothes in a women's clothing store in Tehran, as well as still photographs, similarly doctored, of a wedding celebration in which we see unveiled women dancing with men. The narrator declares triumphantly:

> Not only has Alex photographed Iranian women in traditional garb, but she's also managed *to get behind the veil*, photographing women in situations and circumstances that just a few years ago might have landed both photographer and subject in trouble. (emphasis mine)

Not to be outdone, in February 2000, CNN *Perspectives* aired a personal documentary hosted by the network's popular foreign affairs correspondent, Christiane Amanpour. Amanpour's cultural credentials are even more authentic than those established by Avakian: she, too, is Iranian, but was born and raised in Iran and left the country as a teenager during the 1979 revolution. Not only does she have more cultural authority than Avakian, she also has more cultural capital because of her position as a respected CNN correspondent.

The CNN documentary trumps the *National Geographic* episode as it provides an even more daring unveiling of the mysteries of post-revolutionary Iran and its women. In one scene, we are taken inside an affluent home in north Tehran to witness a party attended by a group of young adults. The CNN camera pans over scantily clad women, (unprotected by the anonymity of black stripes); they are drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, and performing coquettishly for the camera. Amanpour exults in the fact that "noone has ever shown this side of Iranian life on television before. Single men and women are never allowed to mix like this. Especially when they're dressed like this."

Both of these documentaries participate in a long discursive tradition. Western women have historically inserted themselves in the discourse of unveiling the Orient by using their gender as a strategy of unique emplacement. As women, they have argued, they have greater access to the women's quarters and are therefore in a better position to tear away the veil of the exotic East for the consumption of a Western audience. In this case, Avakian and Amanpour authenticate their narratives not only by their gender but also by virtue of their cultural backgrounds. This scopophilic desire to get behind the veil in order to know and to contain the elusive Iranian woman has both a colonial and a feminist history. This history spans at least a century from early missionary women's efforts to modernize Iranian women in the nineteenth century by unveiling them to Kate Millett's 1979 ventures into the Iranian feminist arena and finally to more recent forays by Western feminists in debates about the oppressed status of their Iranian counterparts. Avakian's and Amanpour's photographs and documentary footage belong to a colonial tradition of prurient obsession with disclosing that which lies behind the veil. Indeed, they use their status as North Americanized Iranians to reveal the mystery of the Oriental woman to a Western audience long obsessed with peeking behind the veil.

Contemporary Iranian academics are also complicit in the revival of the veiled woman as exotic and sexually desirable. In his introduction to Taj Ol-Saltaneh's memoirs, Abbas Amanat includes a reproduction of an Orientalist painting in which a semi-clad, yet veiled harem woman poses seductively for the painter. Amanat comments that, "[e]ven though her appearance may have been embellished by the stereotypes of Orientalist paintings of the nineteenth century, Ziba Khanum as she is described by Madame Dieulafoy in 1881 was still a telling example of fashionable sensuality in the harem of the affluent" (31). Several pages later, Amanat issues this peculiar apology:

> . . . the standards of female attractiveness in Naser al-Din's harem are puzzling to contemporary tastes. The pictures of the often badly dressed ladies, huddled together in front of their husband's camera, hardly support the stereotype of the harem beauty portrayed in Orientalist novels and paintings or idealized in the Persian lyrics. (39)

Thus, Amanat insists, the projection of Western fantasies about the Orient as illustrated in the nineteenth-century Orientalist painting of the sensual veiled woman, *not* the photographs of the Shah and his lamentably homely wives, is the authentic image of Persian women.

On the one hand, the post-revolutionary figure of the *bad-hejabi* challenges the contemporary image of the scowling *chadori* by reviving representations of eroticised (and amenable) harem women through her teasing performance of unveiling and reveiling. She thus sustains the axiom that "[b]eneath the shapeless black chador of Iran lie the sensuous curves of Persia" (Anderson 1). On the other hand, the *bad-hejabi* force the terms of the debate to move beyond the reductive veiling/unveiling binary, thus challenging Western representations of veiled Persian women. The *bad-hejab* woman is the site of Spivak's definition of catachresis, "a concept-metaphor without an adequate referent" (1990: 224). Arguably, one could equally postulate that the figure of the *hejabi* circulates, in contemporary postcolonial feminist discourse, as a referent without an adequate concept-metaphor. If the veil is seen unilaterally as a signifier of oppression or of emancipation, where is the place of the *bad-hejab* woman who wears *hejab* while playing with the categories of self-effacement and performance, modesty and vanity? Is the *bad-hejabi* disturbing categories of veiled women or is her alluring act of concealment and revealment merely an endorsement of Orientalist fantasies about the East?

Of equal interest, how do we read the figure of the politically vigilant *hejabi* who calls herself a feminist, and whose outspoken and visible participation in Iranian political and national affairs undercuts the stereotype of the silent veiled woman? In the August 2001 issue of *Mother Jones* magazine, Camelia Entekhabi Fard addresses the nuances and complexities of compulsory *hejab*, and the ways in which it is being contested, in contemporary Iran:

> To feminists in the West, the veil epitomizes everything that is wrong with the Iranian revolution. But the hejab means different things to different

> people; it is simultaneously a symbol of domination and liberation, of piety and rebellion. For Iranian men, the hejab has traditionally been a means of defending women's honor and protecting their chastity . . . But for Iranian women, the hejab has an entirely different meaning: It affords a convenient protection for their public lives. In a society where an unveiled female is seen as sexually available, most women would wear some kind of hejab outside their homes even without state coercion – and many who have entered the workforce and the academy would simply return to their traditional roles rather than remove their veils. (72)

In contemporary feminist discourse, the figure of the articulate, vigilant *hejabi* emerges as a chiasmus, the site of what Spivak has called "a double contradiction" (1989: 274). To date, most feminist writings on this topic suggest that to be veiled is to be silent and demure; to be unveiled is to be an outspoken feminist. How can feminist discourse come to terms with this seeming contradiction of the *hejabi* as feminist who does not celebrate or condemn the veil, and who in fact does not see it as a primary concern? How can secular diasporic Iranian and Western feminists grow to appreciate the position of women currently active within the Islamic Republic? These feminists are currently fighting for equal access to child custody, equal opportunities in the workplace, and equal representation in a legal system in which a woman's testimony is worth half that of her male counterpart. These are feminists who are veiled but not servile, feminists who are vigilant and articulate. These feminists would bristle at the thought of being saved by their Western and diasporic counterparts whose models of feminism and activism have so little in common with their own. Indeed, the cinema, an ascending form of cultural expression in Iran, and one that has garnered a significant international audience, has recently become the most visible forum in which Iranian women are realizing and actuating an indigenous feminist agenda of their own making.

Chapter Four

Female Homosociality and Resistance in Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema

"Being human is not a privilege; it is an inalienable right." This statement, boldly asserting the equal status of men and women as human beings, echoes defiantly throughout Rakhshan Bani-Etemad's *The May Lady* (1998) as well as other recent Iranian films directed by women. This declaration of women's equal rights presents a challenge to the Islamic Republic and its relegation of women to the position of second-class citizens. It also encapsulates the common theme of the movies discussed in this chapter: that Iranian women be entitled to the same social, economic, and legal rights as men.

Since the late 1980s, post-revolutionary Iranian cinema has gained a privileged status on the international film festival circuit. Some of the more prominent film directors who have enjoyed international fame include Abbas Kiarostami, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, and Dariush Mehrjui. More recently, a growing number of female directors such as Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, Samira Makhmalbaf, Marzieye Meshkini, Tahmineh Milani, and documentary film-maker Ziba Mir-Hosseini have been celebrated both in Iran and abroad.

Contemporary representations of Iranian women in post-revolutionary cinema demonstrate the ways in which women are actively challenging and redefining gender roles from within the limitations imposed upon them by traditional cultural practices as well as by the restrictive laws of the Islamic Republic. These movies also challenge Western and Pahlavi feminist representations of the veiled woman as voiceless and subjugated. The articulation of forceful Iranian feminist voices is exemplified in movies such as *The Spouse* (1994) directed by Mehdi Fakhimzadeh; *Sara* (1994), *Pari* (1996), and *Leila* (1997) by Dariush Mehrjui; *The Circle* (2000) by Jafar Panahi; *Nargess* (1991), *Red* (1999) by Fereydoun Jayrani , *The Blue-Veiled* (1994), and *The May Lady* (1998), directed by Rakhshan Bani-Etemad; *The Apple* (1998), by Samira Makhmalbaf; *The Day I became a Woman* (2000) by Marziyeh Meshkini; *Divorce Iranian Style* (1998) by Ziba Mir-Hosseini and Kim Longinotto; *The Legend of a Sigh* (1991) and *Two Women* (1999) by Tahmineh Milani.

As a way of moving outside the limitations of the discourse of sisterhood, this chapter focuses entirely on indigenous Iranian women, and their various feminist positions within contemporary Iran. This final section will focus on three films in particular: *Divorce Iranian Style*, *The May Lady,* and *Two Women* and their representations of women's marriage, divorce, and child custody rights under the Islamic Republic. In a time when Iranian women are under siege, these films explore the subversive potential of female bonding as a way of defying traditional cultural as well as current legislative prejudices against women. The concept of female bonding presents a challenge to the cultural concept of *gheyrat*, which sees women's behaviour as a yardstick by which male honour and authority are measured. It also contests the Western discourse of sisterhood, which, historically, has been predicated on a structure of inequality between women of different cultures and classes.

Women and feminists in Iran are reconfiguring the terms of the debate within and about Iranian feminism. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's understanding of homosocial desire -

as "the affective or social force, the glue, even when its manifestation is hostility or hatred or something less emotively charged, that shapes an important relationship" - can be relevantly appropriated to thinking about this debate (2).[63] According to Sedgwick, the term "homosocial desire" is oxymoronic since homosociality is often used to describe "male bonding" activities which can be intensely homophobic; she thus attempts "[t]o draw the 'homosocial' back into the orbit of 'desire,' of the potentially erotic" (Sedgwick 1). This chapter will draw on Sedgwick's category of homosocial desire in conjunction with Afsaneh Najmabadi's consideration of female homosocial relations in Persia in order to discuss the changing landscape of Iranian gender relations. It is through the rediscovery of the subversive potential of homosocial spaces that Iranian women have been agitating for legal and social equality with men in Iranian society.

In her work on Iranian modernity, Najmabadi has argued that the pre-modern (veiled) Persian woman existed in a female homosocial space. Women often communicated their poetry and prose to each other orally. With a female audience in mind, the language of the veiled Iranian woman was eroticized and sexually explicit (Najmabadi 1993: 488). The shift from an oral to a print culture, a shift required by a self-styled modern Iran, necessitated a concomitant transformation of women's discourse (Najmabadi 1993: 488). The growing popularity of print culture and state-enforced heterosociality meant that women's literary works, often bawdy, would now have a male and female audience. This movement out of homosocial and into heterosocial spaces, argues Najmabadi, compelled the self-regulation of women's literary expression:

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[63] I recognize the possibility of a perceived contradiction in using the theoretical model of a Western critic. In applying Sedgwick's ideas to the case of Iranian women's agency, I am readjusting and appropriating its possibilities to suit a specific moment in Iranian feminist history. As Afsaneh Najmabadi has argued, the concept of female homosocial relations is not foreign to an Iranian context. Its history, however, remains largely undocumented, because of a cultural context hostile to such an investigation.

> . . . when the female voice found a public audience, it became a veiled voice, a disciplined voice. Erasing or replacing its sexual markers, it sanitized itself . . . In the homosocial female space, language and body could be sexually overt; stepping into the heterosocial world of modernity was coterminous with the construction of a disciplined female language and body (1993: 489).

According to Najmabadi, early twentieth-century discourses positioned the modern, unveiled Iranian woman as chaste and virtuous as opposed to the pre-modern or "traditional," veiled Iranian woman, now represented as licentious.[64] This construction became intimately linked with class position: working-class veiled women were characterized as deceptive and sexually promiscuous, while affluent, urban (unveiled) women, who modeled themselves on a Westernized ideal of femininity, were seen as chaste, modest and self-controlled.

The Iranian woman's de-eroticized body and language was a necessary precursor to the heterosexualization of nationalist discourse. Although Adrienne Rich's work is marked by the limitations of the second wave feminist movement out of which it emerges, I believe that her term, "compulsory heterosexuality," by which she refers to the naturalization and institutionalization of heterosexual relationships, is pertinent to the discussion of the shift from homosocial to heterosocial language in discourses of Iranian nationalism and modernity.[65]

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[64] See chapter three for more discussion of the moral laxity of veiled women.

Najmabadi has remarked that the promotion of heterosocial space at the expense of homosocial female space coincided with, or rather, marked the institutionalization of heterosexuality as the dominant nationalist discourse. The role of mothers as integral to the modern nation became central to Iranian discourses of modernity, and for the first time, marriage became associated with love:

> The modernist writings on gender also mark the heterosexualization of love. Love in classical Perso-Islamic literature is often male homoerotic. This is reflected not only in the celebration of male-male love couples, such as Mahmud and Ayaz, but also in books of advice with separate chapters on love and marriage, where in the former chapters the beloved is male, and issues of marriage and love, unlike the case in the later modernist discourse, are constructed as belonging to different domains . . . With the heterosexualization of love and the romanticization of marriage, homosexuality came to be viewed as a debased expression of sexual appetite that resulted from sexual segregation and the unavailability of women to men. (Najmabadi 1998: 117 n 20)

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[65] Rich has been criticized for essentializing women's, and particularly lesbian women's, experiences, most notably in Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1989.

The 1970s pre-revolutionary period saw a dramatic shift in this paradigm. Although heterosexuality remained the official state sanctioned mode of sexual relations, homosociality and sexual segregation reemerged as the preferred national model of Iranian gender relations. Furthermore, the unveiled woman, now understood as morally corrupt, was denounced as the "Westoxified, painted doll" of the Pahlavi regime, and the veiled woman resumed her place as the epitome of chastity and virtuosity.

I am interested in exploring an altogether new configuration of the Iranian woman here. The women portrayed in contemporary Iranian cinema, particularly those in *Divorce Iranian Style*, *The May Lady* and *Two Women*, are veiled, but they are neither silent nor unchaste. They mobilize their voices to articulate their demands for inclusion - as equals to men - in the Iranian national conscience and under Islamic law. What these movies in particular seem to convey is that women's well-being is contingent upon the absence of men.[66] The regime of compulsory heterosexuality, claims Rich, ensures that "female friendship and comradeship have been set apart from the erotic, thus limiting the erotic itself" (Rich 1980: 650). The re-discovery of women's homosocial space and homosocial desire in post-revolutionary Iran can be traced in these films. Female bonding has become a subversive force in contemporary Iranian cinema, upon which Sedgwick's and Najmabadi's formulation of homosocial desire and relations can shed light. I am suggesting that the return to women's homosocial spaces, ironically enabled by the laws of the Islamic Republic, provide women with an alternative to a disciplinary and controlling masculine culture; *gheyrat* is one vehicle by which Iranian masculine supremacy asserts itself.

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[66] Norma Claire Moruzzi has made this observation in her discussion of *Two Women* and Fereydoun Jayrani's *Red*:

> . . . in both films the heroine is only released from the misery of her marital bondage by the eventual violent death of her husband. . . In Two Women, the heroine is a perfect overachiever who is reduced to absolute passivity by her husband's jealous control. Her release only comes when her stalker murders her husband. In Red, the heroine is a strong-minded nurse and devoted mother who insists on her independence all through the film; when her crazed and violent husband eventually tries to gain ultimate control by killing her, she kills him in self-defense. (92)

The 1998 documentary, *Divorce Iranian Style* was filmed almost entirely in an Iranian family court. A collaborative project by Iranian anthropologist Ziba Mir-Hosseini and documentary film-maker Kim Longinotto, it chronicles the divorce proceedings of six couples, with a particular focus on four cases. This documentary offers us a glimpse of the socially transformative possibilities of female bonding. *Divorce Iranian Style* portrays the ways in which Iranian women, surrounded by a support network of women, strategically work within the limits of divorce laws in order to get what they want. The documentary features four subjects: Massy, a coquettish young woman seeking to divorce her husband on grounds of his impotence; Jamileh, who threatens her philandering husband with divorce, and even has him jailed overnight, in order to teach him a lesson about the consequences of his waywardness; 16 year old Ziba, who desperately seeks a divorce from her 38 year old husband (whom she was forced to wed in an arranged marriage) and resorts to lies and blackmail in order to achieve her goal; and finally, Maryam, who lost custody of her eldest daughter after divorcing her first husband, and who fights to retain custody of her youngest child whom she stands to lose since her remarriage.

In a forthcoming article, Ziba Mir-Hosseini recounts her experiences making the documentary.[67] According to Mir-Hosseini, she spent a considerable amount of time discussing women's legal rights with the petitioners between court sessions. Speaking openly about her own experience, she shared with them her views on divorce and child custody laws in Iran:

> These discussions, and the fact that I took an active role in them, speaking my mind and telling about my own divorce, broke down the barriers and made women feel at ease with the camera. The informality of the court also allowed people to talk to us. When shooting, we always stood together – I with my face at the same level as the camera – and were treated as one person. Kim too was open and did not hide her feelings, making it clear where her sympathies lay – though she could not follow the details. Many times she was moved to tears during the proceedings. (Mir-Hosseini MS 19)

The significant presence of women and their mutual support of each other affords them the courage and the strength to fight for their rights, and to pose a significant threat to the established patriarchal order. Throughout the documentary, the women petitioners engage with the film-makers by turning to the camera, and sharing confidences with Longinotto and Mir-Hosseini whom they see as allies in their disputes. While the women with whom Mir-Hosseini spoke between sessions were, for the most part, supportive of her project and sympathetic to her position regarding women's rights in Iran, many of the men present took the opposite stance. One of the most outspoken opponents to Longinotto's and Mir-Hosseini's presence in the courtroom was a trainee judge "who tried unsuccessfully to convince Judge Deldar to stop [their] work" (Mir-Hosseini MS 19).

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[67] I am grateful to Ziba Mir-Hosseini for kindly granting me permission to use her article, "Negotiating The Politics Of Gender In Iran: An Ethnography Of A Documentary," soon to be published in a collection of essays on Iranian cinema. In this essay, Mir-Hosseini explains their choice of title:

> *Divorce Iranian Style* was suggested by our commissioning editor at Channel 4, Peter Moore, who saw it as a nice play on the well-known comedy, Pietro Germi's *Divorce Italian Style*. Kim and I thought it trivialized our film, but we could not come up with anything better. (22)

The page numbers cited in this chapter are from Mir-Hosseini's original manuscript.

Nasrin Rahimieh uses the phrase "packing the court" to describe the transformation of the divorce court into an arena in which Iranian women can discuss their problems and fight for their legal rights:

> The presence of a sympathetic judge, the court secretary, her daughter and a female camera crew are part of what I see as packing the court. While the laws destined for implementation in the courtroom rest on a fundamental inequality between the sexes, the courtroom itself becomes a space populated by the very constituency its enactment of the law is meant to restrict. In fact, the balance is tipped against men, who coincidentally often emerge as frustrated and powerless. (8-9)[68]

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[68] I would like to thank Nasrin Rahimieh for generously sharing with me her forthcoming article, "Packing the Court in *Divorce Iranian Style*." All page numbers cited in this chapter are from Rahimieh's original manuscript.

Thus, the courtroom – ordinarily dominated by patriarchal laws and the language of Islamic allegiance – is transformed into a productive and resistant homosocial space. The subversive power of women's collective and supportive presence, enables the women petitioners to fight for their rights and for their dignity. Jamileh's situation brings the possibilities of female bonding into specific focus.

Her husband is represented as an irresponsible philanderer who mistreats his wife and children. Jamileh, who turns to the camera and whispers confidentially into the lens that she truly loves her husband and only wants to teach him a lesson, uses the concept of *female* honour -- a direct inversion of *gheyrat* as justification for her legal actions. Rahimieh observes:

> Supported by Judge Deldar and a receptive female film crew, Jamilih combines her attempt to make her husband agree to the terms of a renewed legal contract between husband and wife with a self-affirmation in terms of her own honor . . . Quoting her sister-in-law, Jamilih insists that women, like men, are entitled to *ghiyrat*. Her use of the law and dominant cultural values endows her with an agency in which she clearly revels. (11)

Jamileh's appropriation and feminization of *gheyrat* is inherently threatening to the gendered hierarchy in Iranian culture, in which woman is positioned as the embodiment of male honour. By seeing women as a reflection of masculine dignity, Iranian culture fails to acknowledge women's individual needs and desires. Jamileh's demand that women have access to *gheyrat*, challenges Iranian familial, cultural, and legal structures which limit women to occupying roles in the service of others -- as daughters, as wives, and as mothers. Although Iranian men are also understood to exist within a community, they are at greater liberty than women to pursue their individual goals and desires.

Describing Jamileh's divulgence of her emotions to her ally, the camera, Rahimieh writes:

> This can be seen as an instance when the presence of the camera and the female film crew changes the dynamics of the courtroom. Beyond the filmmakers' desire to lay bare the process that brought them into close interaction with those they filmed, I think the awareness of the camera and the filmmakers allows the women to offer opinions they would otherwise not voice in a courtroom. (11)

It is thus that "[t]he presence of an all-woman crew changed the gender balance in the courtroom, and undoubtedly gave several women petitioners courage" (Mir-Hosseini MS 16). Female bonding and the transformation of patriarchal space into a female homosocial space in *Divorce Iranian Style* destabilizes conventional gender and power relations. Women's demands to be treated as individuals with specific needs and wants is fundamentally challenging to the secondary position relegated to them both within traditional Iranian culture and under the Islamic Republic. It is thus the communal quality of the homosocial space that allows for the subversive articulation of a woman's individual will.

Mockery is one of the devices used by women to enable the dismantling – and demystification – of *gheyrat* as the quintessence of Iranian masculinity. In one of the early scenes of *Divorce Iranian Style*, Massy launches a fervent appeal to the Judge, asking him to grant her divorce. Using her husband's alleged sexual impotence as the main issue of contention, she attempts to persuade the amiable Judge Deldar:

> [My husband] has sexual problems. I found out on our wedding night, but I kept quiet not to shame my family. I cried all through our honeymoon. Everywhere we went, I was in tears. . . I'm ashamed to say it: we didn't do anything on our wedding night. Afterwards, I always had to make the first move.

As her husband and his brother vehemently protest her claims, she turns to her husband and asks repeatedly: "Do you or do you not have sexual problems?" She chases him out of the courtroom, hounding him for a response. The camera shows the Judge struggling to contain his mirth at the comical scene unfolding before him. Shortly afterwards, there is a ruckus in the hall and the unhappy husband returns, with Massy in hot pursuit. He breaks down in hysterics and pleads for the Judge's sympathy for his plight. This episode is an humorous instance of the ways in which women like Massy take advantage of the restricted avenues available to them when seeking divorce. By using one of the conditions available to her as a condition of divorce (male impotence), she undermines her husband's cherished *gheyrat* by emasculating him. He cannot satisfy her sexually, complains Massy, since she is always the one who initiates sexual intercourse. Most shamefully, he is incapable of performing one of the most valued masculine duties: ensuring his progeny.

One of the most effective moments in the documentary involves Paniz, the young daughter of the court secretary, Mrs. Maher. When the judge leaves the courtroom, Paniz takes her seat at his desk, places a makeshift turban (a white ski-hat) over her braided pigtails and proceeds to call the court to order. Her admonishment of the (imagined) wayward, abusive husband before her is simultaneously painful and delightful to watch. In a culture where children, especially girls, are instructed never to question authority, and given a legal system which prohibits women from becoming judges, Paniz's spirited parody of the divorce court leaves us with a powerful image.

The female homosocial space of the court addresses the issue of *gheyrat* by performing a mockery of the entire judicial system as Paniz demonstrates in her clever parody, by re-appropriating it as does Jamileh, or by public humiliation as Massy manages so effectively. One of the paradoxes of current Iranian legislation under the Islamic Republic is that the climate of rigorous morality is enforced through a sexualization of language and legal discourse. While Iranian cultural traditions and the elaborate discursive ritual of *ta'rof* require tact, subtlety, and ambiguity, the legal loophole enabling women to initiate divorce proceedings necessitates the foregrounding of explicit and straightforward language.[69] Currently, an Iranian woman can apply for divorce on very limited grounds. She must be able to prove that her husband is physically abusive or mentally ill. Alternatively, she can argue that her husband is unable to support his family financially, or that he is impotent. Massy's sexually explicit language can thus be attributed to the gender imbalance in the courtroom. The presence of a supportive female community lends her courage to air her concerns with candour to a Judge who, in his official capacity in an Islamic family court, is the arbiter of moral and restrained conduct.

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[69] This in itself might be a way of discouraging women's petition for divorce. Culturally, women's speech and behaviour are regulated through linguistic and physical codes of modesty. Since the language of the court necessitates a more direct and unnuanced discourse, many traditional women automatically feel discouraged from asserting their rights through legal channels.

Female bonding and women's friendships as a site of potential subversion form a strong subnarrative in Tahmineh Milani's unapologetically feminist film, *Two Women* (1999). According to Afshin Molavi, Milani submitted the movie to the Iranian film censorship board in 1995 and "the predominantly male commission showed her the door. . . 'I think many of the men on the board saw themselves in the movie and it was too sensitive for them,' Milani later reflected" (217). *Two Women* was finally released in 1999, and became "the biggest box office hit in Iranian history" (Sciolino 2000: 265).

The story of *Two Women* follows the lives of two university students: the brilliant and ambitious Fereshteh, from the rural labouring classes, and Roya, a bright, middle-class Tehrani. The women meet at Tehran University in the 1978-79 revolutionary period, shortly before the universities shut down during the government's purging of "Westoxified" intellectuals from the academy.[70] Some critics have chosen to read Fereshteh and Roya as two sides of the same woman; in other words, for them, the film is stresses the importance of social and economic class in determining a woman's future. I believe, however, that the intimacy in the two women's relationship deserves closer examination.

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[70] Universities in Iran remained closed for approximately three years after the toppling of the Shah's regime.

The film traces the trajectory of the women's friendship. Fereshteh tutors her fellow students, one of whom is Roya, to finance her way through University. Soon the two women become close friends. In one scene during which Fereshteh and Roya are studying together, Roya gazes at her with open admiration, saying: "You truly are a genius. I swear to you I am being honest. You are a genius. You're lovely – and loveable." Roya uses the language of courtship to express her feelings to Fereshteh who brushes off her lavish compliments, although she clearly enjoys the attention. When Roya discovers that Fereshteh has taught herself to speak English, she crosses the room, leans towards her, and asks her to say a few words. Fereshteh responds coyly (in English): "I want to tell you something. Let's get out of here." Playing the coquette, Fereshteh steps away from Roya who continues to marvel at her and to move closer to her. As with other scenes throughout the movie, the sexual tension between the two women is difficult to ignore. The undercurrent of homoeroticism in the film is particularly subversive as same sex relationships are inherently threatening to the hierarchical organization of heterosexuality in Islamic Iran. Furthermore, gay and lesbian relationships are a crime punishable by death under the current regime.[71]

The playful banter between Fereshteh and Roya and the evident pleasure they derive from each other's company are foregrounded in the movie, and work as one of the primary motivations for male violence in the film. In her queer reading of mainstream cinema, and her analysis of the "hypothetical lesbian" in straight films, Chris Straayer contends that "female bonding and the exchange of glances between women threaten heterosexual and patriarchal structures" (350). There is an added dimension to this threat in the Islamic Republic where same-sex relationships are deemed criminal offences. The light-hearted, flirtatious exchange mentioned above is followed by a violent reestablishment of patriarchal authority. In one scene, Fereshteh and Roya ride the bus home together; they are standing facing each other in the center aisle when Fereshteh's stalker emerges. He places himself behind Roya so that he is directly opposite Fereshteh. Visually, this scene enforces the subtext of the movie: the disruption of male heterosexual fantasy by the lesbian desire between the two women. The stalker sees Roya's presence as an impediment to his union with Fereshteh, and later, Fereshteh's husband regards Roya as a threat to his and Fereshteh's marital happiness.

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[71] Article 131 of the Islamic penal law states: "If the act of lesbianism is repeated three times and punishment is enforced each time, [the] death sentence will be issued the fourth time." Under Article 109: "Punishment for sodomy is killing; the sharia judge decides on how to carry [out] the killing" (Islamic Penal Law)

Following the scene on the bus – during which Roya has the stalker ejected for harassing them – the two women are shown walking companionably along a street when Fereshteh stops to play hopscotch. Roya watches her with undisguised affection and exclaims: "Oh, you are so lovely!" The modest Fereshteh blushes in the face of Roya's compliment, and Roya insists: "I swear to God, I am being truthful. You do everything with perfection. You are mischievous and playful. You are graceful. And I can't believe it – how do you manage to read so many books?" After showering Fereshteh with effusive compliments, Roya turns to find herself face to face with the stalker. He brandishes a knife in front of her, and threatens to kill her. He then issues an ultimatum:

"This had better be the last time you hang around [Fereshteh]. If I see you with her one more time, I will disfigure your face with this," waving a bottle of acid in the air.

Given the historical time period in which this film is set, the mention of acid throwing is particularly significant. Shortly after the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime, the morals police and Islamic vigilantes patrolled the streets, throwing acid on women who behaved or dressed in an immodest fashion. Under a regime in which same-sex relationships are punishable by one hundred lashes, or even execution, the violent threats of Fereshteh's stalker are particularly chilling.[72] He eventually seizes the opportunity to splash his bottle of acid on Fereshteh's (male) cousin, imagining him to be a rival. After this incident, Fereshteh's father, horrified by what he perceives to be the damage done to his honour, orders her to return home to her village. The stalker, however, follows her home. In one chase scene, he races her car with his motorcycle, and they run over two children, killing one and injuring the other. The charges against Roya are dismissed, while her stalker is sentenced to thirteen years in jail; he vows, however, to return and avenge himself on her. In the meantime, Fereshteh's father who continues to fret about his honour, forces her into a marriage in order to "save face."

As Afshin Molavi has observed:

> The issue of honor is central to the problems the film explores – In Iranian

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[72] Article 112 of Islamic penal law stipulates the following about sexual relations between men and boys: "If a mature man of sound mind commits sexual intercourse with an immature person, the doer will be killed and the passive one will be subject to ta'azir of 74 lashes if not under duress." Lesbians, however, are subjected to one hundred lashes each, and after the third offence, they are sentenced to death. (Islamic penal law)

> society a woman is still too often cast as the symbol of a man's honor . . . In mosques across Iran, conservative clerics preach the perverted patriarchy of honor regularly, urging their all-male audiences to "control your women." Even in downtown Tehran mosques, clerics may be heard delivering hour-long rants against men who fail to control their women, with exhortations such as: "Do not let your women wear make-up and Western clothing. This is against your honor." (218)

Indeed, the story of Fereshteh's unrelenting misery revolves around the *gheyrat* of the men in her life: her father, her stalker, and her husband. When Fereshteh is bailed out of jail after the accident involving the two young boys, her father is beside himself with anger at the besmirching of his honour. He decides that it would be more honourable to murder Fereshteh and her sister than suffer the indignity of his injured *gheyrat*. "I will kill both of them tonight. I am not my father's son if I don't send their corpses out of this house tonight," he yells. When Fereshteh pleads her innocence, her father tells her to "silence [her] voice" to which she finally responds in anger: "I will not be silent! I want to speak!" Fereshteh's indignation here can be productively read, I believe, within the context of the increasingly defiant voices of contemporary, indigenous Iranian feminists. She insists on having her own voice, defying not only the state's entrenched patriarchy, but the disciplinary, regulatory discourses of some Western and diasporic Iranian feminists.

Despite Fereshteh's insistence that she complete her degree when universities re-open, her father forces her to get married. Initially, her husband promises her to support her academic and professional goals. Shortly after their wedding, however, he begins to control her movements, eventually confining her to the home and even denying her access to the telephone. When she goes to court to request a divorce, the official asks her whether her husband is impotent, physically abusive, mentally ill, or destitute. She responds in the negative to his questions, and then states: "He insults my intelligence. I am living with a man whom I did not choose. This man is destroying my identity as a human being." When she realizes that these are not legitimate grounds for divorce under the Islamic Republic, she pleads with the official:

> Haj Agha. Look at me. Haj Agha. I want you to see me. I am human. I want to live like a human being. How can you think that if a husband does not provide for me financially, he is a bad man, but if he insults my intelligence, if he destroys my identity as a human being, he is not a bad man? I just want to be a partner in a relationship. . . Am I expecting too much?[73]

Evidently she is expecting too much, since Iranian divorce laws do not recognize women as distinct and independent individuals capable of making decisions about their own lives.

While Fereshteh's relationships with men (her father and her husband) are vilified in this movie, her relationship with her friend Roya is idealized, and eroticized.

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[73] "Haj Agha" is a title of respect used to address Moslem men who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca. The use of this title confers an esteemed status on men by acknowledging their devoutness as Moslem subjects.

Fereshteh's and Roya's friendship is perceived as a threat to the male authority figures in their lives, since, as Straayer has observed, "[t]he primary threat of female bonding is the elimination of the male" (350). Initially, their relationship is interrupted by Fereshteh's stalker; later, Fereshteh's husband goes to great lengths to keep the two women apart. When Fereshteh wants to invite Roya to visit them, her husband sulks and expresses his dislike of her, although he has never met Roya. In order to keep Fereshteh isolated, and away from her friend, he keeps the telephone under lock and key. The ever-resourceful Fereshteh, however, manages to make a duplicate key and secretly telephones Roya. When Fereshteh's husband returns to find her speaking to Roya on the telephone, he flies into a jealous rage. In another scene, we see Fereshteh's husband at the front door, urging Roya, who has come to find Fereshteh, to leave them alone so that they can enjoy their married life without disruption. Unlike previous scenes which feature the two women taking pleasure in each other's company, the camera focuses on Fereshteh's husband, showing only the back of Roya's head. She is effectively cut out of the scene – and out of Fereshteh's life. Even Fereshteh's family conspire against their friendship; Roya's letters to Fereshteh are consistently intercepted by her parents. These elaborate efforts to destroy the two women's friendship suggest the extent of the taboo against same-sex relationships in Iran; it demonstrates as well, an anxiety over the transformative potential of female bonding.

Eventually, Fereshteh's stalker is released from prison and he returns to find her. In a melodramatic penultimate scene, he kills her husband, leaving her free to pick up the pieces of her life. At the end of the movie, Fereshteh summons Roya to her aid and their friendship resumes. Thirteen years of an abusive marriage leave Fereshteh unrecognizable; she has lost her independent and resourceful spirit. There is no longer any suggestion of sexual tension between Fereshteh and Roya when they are reunited after the death of Fereshteh's husband. This is partly due to Fereshteh's shattered sense of self, but more importantly, I believe, it points to a recuperation of the dominant heterosocial narrative. The film's subversive representation of the early stages of their eroticized friendship is contained by Roya's successful marriage, thus affirming Straayer's contention that "[o]ne way to interfere with female bonding is to insert references to men and heterosexuality between women characters" (351). Nevertheless, the recuperation of the heterosexual narrative "remain[s] a feeble attempt to undermine the visual impact that the women together make" (Straayer 351).

The recognition and affirmation of female homosociality from an Iranian feminist context disrupts not only the patriarchal structure of traditional Iranian gender relations, but also the regime of heterosexuality imposed by the discourse of modernity. If the project of secular Iranian modernity, as Najmabadi has argued, discouraged female homosociality and necessitated the construction of the heterosexualized and unveiled body of the Iranian woman, then how can we read the ensuing discourse of Islamic modernity? The model of Islamic womanhood as advocated by Ali Shariati in the 1970s required, much like secular modern discourse, a woman modest in dress and language who subsumed her own desires for the good of the nation. The role of the Moslem Iranian woman, not unlike that of her secular predecessors, entailed the reproduction and nurturing of the nation's future men.

Thus the language of modernity – in its secular and Islamic manifestations – is one of enforced heterosexuality and cultivated homophobia. Sedgwick has argued that:

> . . . the homophobia directed against both males and females is not arbitrary or gratuitous, but tightly knit into the texture of family, gender, age, class, and race relations. Our society could not cease to be homophobic and have its economic and political structures remain unchanged (3).

To be lesbian or gay in Iran is, in effect, to renege on your duty as citizen of the modern nation by not participating in the procreation of its future subjects. At the same time, while Iranian culture is virulently homophobic, there is an undeniable homoerotic undercurrent to same-sex friendships. If the modern Iranian nation enforced the heterosexualization of Iranian citizens through the desexualization of their bodies, modern Islamic discourse re-sexualized them. The enforcement of sexually segregated spaces and rigid sartorial regulations under the Islamic Republic inadvertently facilitated the establishment of homosocial communities and enabled their subversive potential.

Hamid Naficy has argued that the cultural manifestations of *hejab*, or modest clothing, and the Islamic codes of modest behaviour have been translated into the medium of Iranian cinema. These stringent codes of censorship have generated outstanding work by film directors and screen writers who have had to devise innovative ways of by-passing Iranian film censors. As Naficy has observed, "[o]ne of the most significant consequences of veiling in films [is] that filmmakers [are] forced to represent all spaces in the films, even bedroom scenes, as if they [are] public spaces" (Naficy 565).

Even traditional women who choose to wear the veil for personal religious or cultural reasons do not cover their hair in front of their husbands. Women of the more privileged classes, for the most part, only wear *hejab* in public because they are legally obliged to do so. However, in the privacy of their own homes, they remain unveiled in front of male friends or family. The transformation of all space into public space – monitored, legislated and enforced by the government of the Islamic Republic – renders the cinematic representation of private space a difficult negotiation. But film directors are increasingly attempting to toy with these regulations in order to make such scenes appear less artificial to an Iranian audience.

As with all the laws governing the lives of people in the Islamic Republic, the censorship regulations for cinema are arbitrary, and their enforcement often depends upon the whim of the authority figure in charge. In an article about an international seminar on women in contemporary cinema held in Iran in January 2001, Rose Issa lists the censorship regulations for Iranian cinema published in a booklet by the Ministry of Culture in summer 1996. Issa writes that the following are "[a]t random, . . . forbidden":

> - tight feminine clothes
> - the showing of any part of a wom[a]n's body except the face and hands
> - physical contact, tender words or jokes, between men [and] women
> - jokes either [about] the army, police or family
> - negative characters with a beard (which could assimilate them with religious figures)
> - foreign or coarse words

- foreign music, or any type of music which brings joy!
- showing favourably a character who prefers solitude to collective life
- policemen and soldiers badly dressed or having an argument (Issa 3)

Because of the censorship guidelines that prevent any visual representation of affection or love between a man and a woman, Iranian film directors have had to develop creative ways of working around them. For instance, Dariush Mehrjui often shows a man and woman playfully teasing each other while indulging in lavish meals as, for example, in *Leila, Hamoon*, and *Pari*, his 1996 adaptation of J.D. Salinger's *Franny and Zooey*. The sensuality of the food is meant to stand in for the physical and emotional passion between the couples.

The censorship guidelines that prohibit physical contact or intimacy between men and women allow the representation of affection between two women or two men. Ironically, post-revolutionary cinematic codes of modesty appear to have enabled coded representations of homosocial desire in a country where gay and lesbian relationships are outlawed. As Jonathan Dollimore has argued, "dissidence may not only be repressed by the dominant (coercively and ideologically), but in a sense actually produced by it, hence consolidating the powers which it ostensibly challenges" (26). Indeed, the simultaneous enforcement of a regime of compulsory heterosexuality and repression of public expressions of heterosexuality by the Islamic Republic unwittingly supports the strengthening of the homosocial communities it explicitly outlaws.

By disrupting established Iranian gender hierarchies, female homosocial networks enable women to move outside of the heterosexual and patriarchal family units that position them as extensions of their fathers, their brothers, and eventually, their husbands. Contemporary Iranian movies seem to suggest that women's happiness and sense of fulfillment requires the absence of men – and the presence of women. In *Two Women,* Fereshteh's freedom, and the rekindling of her friendship with Roya, is achieved at the expense of her husband's life. In *Divorce Iranian Style,* women, supported by other women, fight for the right to divorce their husbands and lead their own lives. In Mehrjui's *Hamoon* (1989) and *Sara*, his 1996 adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, the female protagonists express their need to divorce their husbands in order to survive as individuals. Although the male lover in Bani-Etemad's *The May Lady* is represented in a positive light, he is physically absent during the entire film, thus raising the question of whether it is his (physical) remoteness that enables her to pursue a fulfilling and independent life.

While husbands and fathers remain, for the most part, absent in *Divorce Iranian Style* and *The May Lady*, single mothers figure prominently. These films trouble the category of Iranian motherhood by recognizing women's desires to occupy more than just maternal roles; they address women's rights as independent, self-sufficient individuals. Perhaps most controversially, they address women's right to love. In *Divorce Iranian Style,* Maryam, who battles against losing custody of her youngest daughter, claims that she will divorce her second husband in order to keep her child. She later retracts that statement and asks defiantly why Iranian child custody laws must force her to choose between her love for her (new) husband and her love for her child. Maryam allows Longinotto and Mir-Hosseini to film her and her husband in their home, and speaks openly about the rights of women in marriage: "A woman wants love and affection," she says to the camera.[74]

The documentary follows Maryam's case closely and reveals the cruel impact of child custody laws on the lives of divorced women. Although Judge Deldar chastises Maryam's ex-husband for his elder daughter's deteriorating scholastic performance since leaving her mother's care, Iranian law is unequivocal in denying Maryam custody of her children. The documentary ends by showing Maryam's utter devastation when she realizes that all avenues are closed to her and that she will lose both her children.[75]

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[74] Mir-Hosseini explains that Maryam initially refused to be filmed, until one days she listened to a discussion involving Mir-Hosseini and a group of women outside the courtroom:

> . . . one day in our second week, when the judge was out, I was sitting on a bench in the corridor and as usual discussing women's legal rights with women petitioners. That day our discussion turned on how women themselves allowed gender inequalities in the law to continue. I said that nothing would change for women unless they did something themselves; we women must ask for our rights, they won't be handed to us on a plate; we should speak out, make our voices heard, but we don't because we are so ashamed of making public something we think should be private. Maryam was there; she didn't say anything, but next day, when she saw me in the corridor, she said: "now I want to be in your film." From then on, she accepted us as friends and confided in us, and we became her only allies in the court. (MS 18)

[75] Women's limited divorce and child custody rights under Iranian law are recurring themes in post-revolutionary Iranian movies. In *Hamoon*, the female protagonist, Mahshid, argues with a court official who is reluctant to grant her permission to divorce her husband:

> My concern here is about women's rights. The main issue is that the right to divorce only belongs to men. Do women have any rights at all? Each aspect of women's rights has been trampled upon in this society. They are never allowed to make decisions, even regarding their own divorce, but men can get divorced whenever they please. Women are obliged to suffer and put up with unworthy husbands for an entire lifetime. (*Hamoon* 1989)

Maryam demands a radical revisioning of marriage and love as they are currently configured within a traditional Iranian context. This is a position with which Mrs. Maher, the court secretary cannot sympathize: "This woman has no maternal feelings. She gave up her children for lust," she tells Mir-Hosseini. Mir-Hosseini then asks her: "Must only mothers suffer? Women want happiness too." Rahimieh argues that:

> [t]he terms Mrs. Maher uses to describe motherhood as founded upon self-sacrifice resonates deeply in twentieth-century Iranian discourses about women's place in the nation. . . What Mrs. Maher's views about Maryam point up is the need to ask why a good or responsible mother is necessarily contingent on women abandoning their own desires and needs (9,10).

Women's right to love and happiness is a constant refrain in these movies. In *The May Lady*, the female protagonist muses, "Love belongs to human beings. Why doesn't it belong to a mother. Isn't a mother a human being?" Indeed, the concept of the modern Iranian woman was fashioned, much like Western feminist discourses of the early twentieth-century, upon a model of responsible and self-abnegating motherhood.[76] The modernist discourses of heterosociality, as described by Najmabadi, enforced a regime of compulsory heterosexuality. Elided here was the space of female bonding and the recognition of women as individual subjects.

The May Lady is a story told from the perspective of Forough Kia, a documentary film-maker and divorced mother. This movie, which was banned for eight years in Iran, and then inexplicably released in 1998, presents an introspective examination of the position of women in contemporary Iranian society. Forough is a successful film-maker and devoted mother with a male lover who remains invisible throughout the movie. As Naficy has observed, the presence of Forough's lover is imparted through the exchange of love letters, in their telephone calls and through voice-over technique:

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[76] See chapter One for further elaboration on early twentieth-century discourses of feminism, nationalism, and motherhood.

> [o]ne of the narrative innovations [in Bani-Etemad's *The May Lady*] is the way the male lover is simultaneously both effaced and inscribed in the film by means of a complex game of veiling and unveiling as well as voicing and unvoicing. He is visually absent from the entire film, but he is simultaneously present throughout by the epistolary means of telephone, letters, and voice-over poetry. . . These interweaving male and female voices symbolically substitute for the desired but dreaded – because outlawed – physical contact between unmarried couples. (572)

In one letter to her lover, Forough writes:

> There are a thousand wishes in your eyes
> A thousand silent canaries in my throat
> O, that love had a language to speak

The expression of erotic love in this film is seen, as in the case of Maryam in *Divorce Iranian Style*, as something that must remain concealed. This is an emotion to which women, as mothers, are not allowed access. But Forough contemplates her various roles as film-maker, mother and lover, asserting: "I don't want to choose one role at the expense of the other."

The May Lady addresses one of the fundamental contradictions in official government discourse about motherhood: the simultaneous valorization of, and disregard for, the position of mothers in Iranian society. In one scene, Forough bails her son out of jail after he is arrested for attending an illegal mixed-sex party. The scene is highly controversial because the government, despite its draconian laws against most forms of socializing between the sexes, likes to project an image of itself as reasonable and just. This incident in *The May Lady* illustrates the arbitrariness of these laws; the fact that this scene was not censored by the Ministry of Culture is astonishing although as Elaine Sciolino has observed, "[s]ometimes two versions of a film are made – an original for foreign distribution, a sanitized version for domestic consumption" (2000: 261).

At the jail house, Forough launches into an impassioned defense of her son and his friends, demanding to know with what crime they are being charged. The official responds: "If you, as a mother, do not know that these parties are against the country's laws, then what do we expect of the young?" Forough replies: "I don't want to stand in the way of the country's laws, but are you aware of the misfortunes befalling this young generation? Why are they used to breaking laws? Because their natural needs are not being taken into consideration!" The official decides she is incapable of being reasonable, and that he would do better to speak to her husband. Upon discovering that she is a divorced mother, he concludes: "This is the outcome of the absence of a guardian." The exchange ends with Forough's rising anger as she exclaims: "My son is not without a guardian. I am his mother!"

The male official's dismissal of motherhood is juxtaposed against the documentary project on which Forough is working. Her film pays homage to the role of mothers in Iranian society, and seeks to determine, by conducting a number of interviews with women from a range of social and economic classes, the exemplary Iranian mother. In an effective blending of the genres of drama and documentary, the film includes real interviews with prominent Iranian feminists Faezeh Hashemi, Mehrangiz Kar, and Shahla Lahiji.

In response to her question regarding the necessary qualities of an exemplary mother, Faezeh Hashemi, daughter of former President Rafsanjani, and a proponent of Islamic feminism, responds:

> I think an exemplary mother is a woman who can understand the different problems; for example, psychological, spiritual and other types, facing her children. She should be able to bring up her children in accordance with the conditions of the time, belief, culture, tradition and all other considerations. She should be able to meet the modern demands of her children.

Shahla Lahiji, an outspoken feminist, activist, and writer, states: "All women who blend 'being a mother' with being part of, or half of, society and the human race are exemplary mothers." Mehrangiz Kar's response, however, is the most provocative: "I do not know why an exemplary mother has to be chosen in the first place." Her criticism of the question reinforces one of the main arguments of the movie: that a woman is more than just a mother.

Demonstrating a sensitivity to differences of class, Kar expresses her surprise that

Forough has come to her law office, looking for an exemplary mother. The women she deals with, Kar tells her:

> need to be judged according to different standards, both in terms of their good and bad qualities. We cannot express our opinions – nor make judgements about these women based on the prevalent criteria for exemplary mothers. We deal with mothers who lead lives outside of the conventions that you know and value.

This attention to differences of class brings to the fore important questions that are now, more so than ever before, being considered by Iranian feminists.

Although there are differences between the feminist positions of the three women interviewed -- Lahiji and Kar are secular feminists, whereas Hashemi embraces "Islamic feminism" -- the three women underscore the fact that mothers are, in the first instance, human beings and should have access to the same rights as men.

Although *Two Women* and *The May Lady* – both banned for several years by the government – have since played to much popular acclaim to audiences in Iran, *Divorce Iranian style* has yet to be screened in the country. In the West, the documentary has been actively promoted and celebrated on the International Film Festival circuit and has sparked much discussion on the status of Iranian women. The popular reception of *Divorce Iranian Style* in the West is perhaps unsurprising since the nature of the genre is such that it promises to offer a glimpse into an otherwise forbidden terrain. In its own way, *Divorce Iranian Style* offers Western viewers the long-desired glimpse behind the veil. Generally, the reviews of the film in the West have been laudatory of Iranian women, who, oppressed by a backward system, miraculously manage to fight back. In one review, Nick Poppy invokes the familiar image of the veiled woman as invisible and silent: "Don't let their veils fools you; these are *outspoken* women" (1, emphasis mine).

Poppy's article begins by evoking stereotypical images of post-revolutionary Iran as impenetrable, unknowable and threatening. He then remarks:

> But there are signs, too, that Iran is starting to open itself up to foreign eyes, or allowing at least access to a keyhole to peep through. (1)

Poppy's language invokes the notion of concealment and emergence, veiled mysteries and unveiled truths discussed in previous chapters. It is precisely this assumption of gaining "access to the truth" – an assumption inherent to the genre of the documentary – that appeals to Western audiences and repels (some) Iranian viewers.[77]

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[77] In her article, Mir-Hosseini discusses the negative reactions of many Iranians – both in exile and at home – towards the film. At issue is the question of the *truth* of representation. Despite their radically different political and social positions, Mir-Hosseini observes the similarity between the reactions of Iranian government officials and Iranian reactions to the film. Both groups continue to obsess about the country's negative image in Western media; *Divorce Iranian Style*, they believe, contributes to this unfavourable characterization (26). The documentary, they argued, "did not represent represent the 'reality' of women's life in Iran, arguing that it gave foreigners a 'distorted and wrong image' of Iranian culture and society" (27). Mir-Hosseini describes the reaction of the Iranian diasporic community as falling into three separate categories:

> First are those who identify politically with elements of the Iranian opposition abroad: they saw the film as propaganda for the Islamic Republic . . . In the second category are non-political Iranian expatriates, largely middle-class in background, who said that the film 'made them feel ashamed in front of foreigners' . . . Behind these two exreme reactions was a third, which not only dismissed conspiracy theories but took issue with objections that the film is not 'representative'. It saw the film as an indictment of Islamic law and the Islamic Republic. (24)

Iranian officials objected to the film because it "undermined the image of the strong family that is the foundation of the Islamic system" (27). Although the government will

In his analysis of the genre of the documentary, Paul Wells observes:

> [i]t is often the case that documentary is believed to be the recording of actuality – raw footage of real events as they happen, real people as they speak, real life as it occurs, spontaneous and unmediated. (168)

Indeed, *Divorce Iranian Style* creates the illusion of the documentary as "raw footage of real events." The camera enters into the private space of women's cloakrooms, taking the audience with it. In some ways, the film undermines its own achievements by re-inscribing Western voyeurism as it affords the viewer a glimpse into women's private space. The cloakroom scene promotes the sense of the "real," as an undoctored, unedited version of life in Iran by affording an intimate view of the effects of Iranian law on women's bodies. The cloakroom functions as an in-between space, mediating between the outside world and the world of the courtroom. This is the space where the arm of Iranian law extends, demanding that women conform to its regulations. But at the same time, the official discourse of authority is subverted by the eye of the camera that shows most women disobeying the Islamic Republic's rigorous dress codes. One by one, women who enter the cloakroom are asked to remove their make-up in order to be permitted access to the courthouse. There are boxes of Kleenex on hand for women to remove their heavy make-up; one woman even asks to borrow a chador from the female

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not allow the film to be screened in Iran, Mir-Hosseini suggests that many people have either seen it (because of the flourishing trade in contraband Western videos) or have heard about it through Voice of America and BBC radio stations to which many Iranians listen.

clothing inspectors, the implication being that spare chadors are regularly kept on hand for the numerous bad-*hejabi*. *Divorce Iranian Style* thus reveals women's continuous subversion of the laws regulating their behaviour and clothing.

Feminist lawyer and activist Mehrangiz Kar reminds us that the changes in Iran today suggested by such scenes as these are entirely due to the hard work of women themselves (6). According to Kar, Iranian women's efforts to win the support of moderates have initiated some changes on behalf of women. For example, laws regarding the wearing of *hejab* and make-up are less strictly enforced than in the years immediately following the revolution. However, as journalist Maryam Aghvami writes, "[a]fter four years of small improvements in their lot, Iranian women want more than just the right to wear make-up and nail-varnish. They want a share in power" (1).

Although the question of compulsory *hejab* remains a concern for Iranian women, feminists such as Lahiji and Kar recognize that women's access to the same rights as men at home and in the workplace are the pressing issues facing women in contemporary Iran. In a speech delivered in Tehran on the history of women's representation in Iranian cinema, Lahiji stated:

> The special dress of the Iranian woman may be a vehicle for her purer presence, but *it must not and should not prevent her presence*. If we accept the rule that the Muslim Iranian woman must be covered, we must at the same time, try and draw up plans so that the limits of this covering does [sic] not conceal her real identity and role. (Lahiji 7, emphasis mine)

The fundamental issues with which Iranian women are dealing at present have little to do with the question of *hejab*; rather, they involve challenging the laws that actively discriminate against them at home, in the workplace, and in the courtroom.

In Kar's view, although the moderates have made some positive changes to the laws created and enforced by the post-revolutionary government, their position on women's issues remains almost indistinguishable from that of the conservatives:

> Indeed, it seems that the moderates themselves are not fundamentally convinced of the need for the equality of the rights of men and women. Indeed, even they can hardly tolerate it. As a result, the two approaches, one supporting suppression of women and the other talking about moderating that suppression, have continued to cooperate in all areas, especially in the legislation of new laws. The outcome has been the passage of laws based on suppression that only appear, on the surface, to be moderate. (Kar 6)

Kar's comments are a sobering reminder that the language of democratic freedoms and human rights as promoted by the reform faction in the Iranian government is not inclusive. The politics of national movements invariably exclude women. Despite the fact that women's participation was crucial to the success of the 1979 revolution, their concerns were forcibly subsumed in the name of a greater national good.

There are important disagreements between contemporary Iranian feminists on this subject. For example, Kar and Lahiji locate the problems facing Iranian women in a discriminatory legal system and its laws, while Hashemi believes, as she states in *The May Lady*, that:

> the problems in [Iran] do not stem from the law itself, but from its enforcement. . . This is mainly due to the dominant culture in our country. Also the judges are all males and cannot understand the condition of women.

Despite the diversity of opinions amongst feminists in Iran, they are all in agreement on one point: that Iranian women are equal to men and should have access to the same rights and privileges.

The space of resistance from which contemporary Iranian feminists are working can be understood as a space of homosociality and collective will. The 1979 anti-imperial revolution showed women the enabling possibilities of collective resistance. During the revolutionary period, Michel Foucault went to Iran and was fascinated by the force of the image that he witnessed: "on the one side, the will of the people; on the other the machine guns" (Kritzman 216). Foucault saw the Iranian revolution as a rare instance in history during which an entire nation came together in its collective desire to overthrow a detested regime. He believed that he was witnessing a rarity in human history – the collective desire of a people to work towards a redefinition of their subjectivity. Although Foucault was subjected to much ridicule and derision for his analysis of the Iranian revolutionary period, I believe that his observations about the power of the collective will are crucial to an understanding of political and social change.

Foucault, however, did not account for differences of gender in his assessment of the collective national will. Indeed, the collective will as it was manifested during the revolution was gendered male, and women's desires were subsumed under one single desire: the overthrow of the Shah. I would argue, however, that women in Iran are drawing on the lessons and the mistakes of the past, and are now mobilizing the idea of a female collective will in their efforts to effect radical changes to the position of women in post-revolutionary Iran.

A female collective will enabling women's homosocial resistance is allowing women from all social classes to come together to make space for women in the Iranian nation. This model of female collectivity has important philosophical differences from that of sisterhood because it does not rest on a false promise of equality and sameness between all women. It recognizes and makes room for differences of class, ethnicity, and politics, and rejects disingenuous claims to sameness, while fitting itself to the specific cultural and political conditions of the present moment in Iran. Iranian women, through the collective strength imparted by homosocial bonding, are working towards the same objective: legal recognition of their equal status with men.

Conclusion

Leaving Sisterhood Behind

This dissertation has attempted to trace the intersection of Western and Pahlavi feminist discourses with the discourses of global sisterhood and modernity. It has examined the ways in which privileged Western and Iranian women positioned themselves as models of ideal womanhood against which working-class Iranian women were measured unfavourably. The emergence of Western and Iranian women as agential subjects required a devalued other or abject figure in order to consolidate their status as independent and progressive women.

According to Judith Butler, the very process of becoming a subject requires the construction of abjection:

> The abject designates those "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the "unlivable" is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. In this sense, then, the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, "inside" the subject as its own founding repudiation. (2)

One of the principal arguments of this thesis contends that, as feminists such as Antoinette Burton and Meyda Yegenoglu have argued, the early feminist discourse of global sisterhood emerged out of a specific historical period during which women were excluded from the universal language of individual rights and freedom as espoused by Enlightenment thinkers. Western women sought to escape this force of exclusion by looking to the East. By mobilizing the language of sisterhood, Western women, and eventually, Oriental women from the privileged classes, positioned themselves as fully formed subjects against which less privileged Oriental women were constructed as abject.

Although there have been a number of feminists – Leila Ahmed, Inderpal Grewal, Gayatri Spivak, Vron Ware, among others – who have documented the complicitous relationship of feminist discourses with the language and the project of colonialism, there remains a reluctance amongst many feminists to recognize the dubious origins of the global sisterhood movement in the West. Of equal importance, I would argue, is the active participation of Oriental women from the elite classes in positing a figuration of the (often working class) Oriental women as subjugated and in need of feminist enlightenment. In the Iranian context, for example, the state-enforced and regulated feminism of the Pahlavi period was informed, indeed tainted, by the colonial context out of which the language of global sisterhood emerges. Feminism in Iran, much like its historical roots in the West, has been inextricable from the history of imperial expansion and class oppression, therefore limiting its potential as an oppositional theory for social and political change.

The program of "top-down," enforced, and widespread modernization fervently embraced by Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi required the service of a visible feminist "movement," under the auspices of the *Women's Organization of Iran*

(WOI), to legitimize the nation's cultivated image as modern, advanced, and progressive. At the same time, this feminism had to be contained lest it challenge the very state that sanctioned it. Indeed, official Iranian, or perhaps what can be termed more accurately as "Pahlavi feminism," was part and parcel of the project of modernization which the two Pahlavi Shahs implemented with fervour.

The Pahlavis' zeal for modernizing Iran has been matched by an equal zeal on the part of some Iranian academics striving to locate the moment of Iranian modernity. Some have argued that it began with the Constitutional Revolution; others believe that modernity began with the Pahlavi era; others still that Mohammad Reza Shah's White Revolution ushered in the period of modernity. For the most part, until quite recently, the 1979 revolution was seen as a regression, a move away from modernity. Amongst the questions that should be considered in these debates, but are too infrequently raised include the following: What is at stake in the impulse to locate the moment of modernity? How do we read the desire for a "modern" moment given modernity's complicitous relationship with colonial and imperial interests? Where is the place of the gendered body in the project of modernity?

Iranian women have been consistently used as national symbols or markers of the cultural, political, and social status of the country. They have been repeatedly propelled into the public arena by self-serving regimes that have manipulated the body of the Iranian woman as a spectacle or symbol of "modernization" and "Westernization" (under the Pahlavi regime) and then as a symbol of "anti-imperialism" and nationalism (under the Islamic Republic). At the same time, they have been denied full participation in the discourse of modernity.

In another context, Homi Bhabha has queried: "what is modernity in those colonial conditions where its imposition is itself the denial of historical freedom, civic autonomy and the 'ethical' choice of refashioning?" (241). Zohreh Sullivan's "Eluding the Feminist, Overthrowing the Modern? Transformations in Twentieth-Century Iran" raises this very question in the context of the project of Pahlavi modernity and feminism. She examines the underside of the project of modernization in Iran, particularly in rural areas, where modernization was forced on the peasant classes in a manner that denied their civil rights, and subjected rural and working class Iranian women – often the targets of the agents of modernization – to increased abuse by their husbands and fathers who saw the "modernization" of their wives and daughters in direct conflict with their *gheyrat*, or male honour.

An example of the collusion of Iranian feminism with discourses of modernity and imperialism is provided by Sullivan's discussion of the much lauded early feminist, Siddiqeh Dowlatabadi. In 1917, Dowlatabadi started the first school for girls in Isfahan; in 1923, she travelled throughout Europe and studied at the Sorbonne, returning to Iran in 1927. She was an outspoken opponent of the veil, and launched a feminist magazine modelled on *Taking Care of Home and Children*, a journal published by *International Woman Suffrage Alliance* president [Margery] Ashby (Sullivan 230). Although Sullivan rightly acknowledges the many achievements of Dowlatabadi, she observes that "[a] second reading of the Siddiqeh Dowlatabadi story reveals some troubling fault lines. A courageous feminist and activist all her life, she consolidated her feminism along class lines" (230). While Dowlatabadi befriended Ashby and attended international women's conferences, she was a direct participant in the suffering of working class Iranian women:

> Not only was the marriage between her seventy-year-old father and the nine-year-old daughter of his secretary arranged by Siddiqeh Dowlatabadi, the story continues with the following detail: when the girl was in labor before her first menstruation howling with pain and hanging from the beams in her bedroom, Siddiqeh Dowlatabadi ordered the family to leave her alone. . . When the young wife was fifteen – after giving birth to two daughters, one of whom was Pari's mother – she was widowed. Once again, Siddiqeh Dowlatabadi arranged for her to marry an old man . . . (Sullivan 231)[78]

This appalling story of the active participation of a celebrated feminist in the oppression of her working class "sister" underscores the problem with the disingenuous language of sisterhood. While it purports to work for the equal rights of all women, in reality, it promotes the interests of the privileged few. Sullivan has observed that:

> [d]escended from the 'lower-class interloper who had come into the family,' Pari was always aware of her difference from and inferiority to the other Dowlatabadis. And 'difference' perhaps became the category through which Dowlatabadi found more common ground with Margaret

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[78] This account comes out of Sullivan's interview with Pari, Dowlatabadi's niece.

> [sic] Ashby in Paris than with her father's child bride (231).

The same observation can be made regarding the relationship of WOI members with second wave American feminists in the 1970s. Pahlavi feminism established, as I argue in chapters Two and Three, sisterly relations across cultures with women who circulated within the same social and economic class. The category of sisterhood, it appears, has difficulty expanding to include women across classes.

This dissertation has argued for the importance of foregrounding and understanding the colonial history of global sisterhood. It provides a closer look at the ways in which the oppressive roots of feminism influenced the feminist praxis of Western as well as state-sponsored Iranian feminists. Chapter One maintains that the language of feminism, particularly that of sisterhood, was mobilized by nineteenth-century women missionaries, travellers, and feminists in order to justify their participation in the colonial and imperial project. I have tried to argue that it is vital for Western and Pahlavi feminists (now in the diaspora) to acknowledge their complicity with this imperialist history, and move away from the dated model of enlightened feminist pedagogues instructing unenlightened female subjects. Contemporary feminists need to recognize the ways in which the feminist movement has become institutionalized and legitimized on an international scale and to acknowledge the limitations as well as the possibilities of this kind of institutionalization and internationalization.

The political and institutional legitimacy of the international sisterhood movement is represented by such milestones as the 1975 International Women's Year, the UN Decade for women (1976-1985) and four world conferences on Women: Mexico City

1975; Nairobi 1985; Copenhagen 1990, and most recently Beijing 1995. As discussed in chapter Two, the events of Mexico City highlighted the major problems with the global sisterhood movement, and by the early 1980s, universal sisterhood had come under severe attack by many feminists who objected to the elitism and racism of their global sisters. In a 1986 special issue devoted to the Second UN Conference on women held in Nairobi, *Canadian Women Studies* (*Cws/cf*) editors write a somewhat chastened editorial:

> For many Western feminists who went to Nairobi, it was a watershed: we have integrated a much more global perspective into our feminism. . . The mistake made in the past by Western women was to assume that their problems were universal. (3)

A decade later, the editors of the 1996 "Post-Beijing" issue demonstrate how short their memories are, writing: "There is no question that *Cws/cf* has taken a central place in representing the global voices of women and this issue continues this important role" (5).

This rather bold, self-congratulatory statement emerges from a very different space than the more chastened, subdued editorial in the "Post-Nairobi" issue ten years earlier. While the 1986 editorial made certain self-censuring gestures about the insensitivity and cultural imperialism of Western feminists, the Beijing issue repositions Western feminists as central leaders in the international feminist movement. In fact, the 1990s witnessed a revival of universal sisterhood and its metamorphosis into "transnational" feminism. The difference, I believe, remains one of semantics; in terms of ideology and practice, the movement has changed very little since its origins. This is why I believe in emphasizing the importance of recent and more distant history in order to ensure future accountability.

Despite the efforts of transnational feminists to distance themselves rhetorically from the painful legacy of global sisterhood, transnational sisterhood continues to reproduce an imperialist feminist discourse and practice that cannot be dissociated from its cultural history. According to Bina Agarwal, the Beijing conference proves that "romantic sisterhood is giving way to strategic sisterhood for confronting the global crisis of economy and polity" (88). Transnational feminists have since latched on to Agarwal's term, "strategic sisterhood," in an effort to differentiate transnational sisterhood from the colonial history of global sisterhood.

I am suggesting here that there is nothing new about transnational or international feminist networking. International feminist alliances are not an innovation of the twenty-first century; furthermore, international organizations have never been as inclusive or as representative as they have claimed. In an article on the *International Woman Suffrage Alliance* (or, as it was later renamed, the *International Alliance of Women*), Charlotte Weber observes that, "membership patterns within the organization ultimately reproduced the global relations of dominance between imperialist and colonized countries" (137). As Alena Heitlinger has pointed out:

> The power and influence of different national feminisms are far from equal: historically and now, the transnational dialogue has been heavily dominated by mainstream feminist discourses and superior financial resources in the wealthier and more powerful Western countries (9).

Indeed, this was the case in Beijing. Most of the articles in the *CWS/cf* "Post-Beijing" issue gloss over the fact that the decision regarding who should attend the NGO forum was determined by donor agencies based in the West. In the *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, however, Indu Agnihotri describes the cultural imperialism of the Beijing conference in this way:

> [B]udgets and the decision as to who went to the Conference and who spoke boiled down to a question of money. At least half of the delegates to the NGO Forum were from the U.S. and Canada. . . . the NGOs and NGO caucuses are based in the First World: their heads and spokespersons are largely from there. Though a token presence of the others may be seen, they are not always allowed to voice their opinions. (122)

These conferences are, in Spivak's words, "global theatre staged to show participation between the North and the South, the latter constituted by Northern discursive mechanisms - a Platform of Action and certain power lines between the UN, the donor consortium, governments and the elite Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs)" (2). Spivak claims that those who are left out are the poorest women of the South who might have had some voice and representation through the NGOs that were not approved for participation at the Forum. In the tradition of the early twentieth century *International Woman Suffrage Alliance* and the 1970s global sisterhood movement, those women who speak for the disenfranchised in the third world belong to a cultural, political, and economic elite who occlude the concerns of the women for whom they speak.

But the universalizing discourse of global sisterhood makes no allowances for class analysis. In the introduction to the *Sisterhood is Global* anthology published in 1984, Robin Morgan dismisses such critiques by claiming that class is a category "invented by patriarchy to divide and conquer" (19). The current popular catch-phrase used by transnational feminists to deflect criticism is "cultural relativism," a term used derisively by transnational feminists invested in recuperating the nostalgia of universal sisterhood. In the 1995 *Cws/cf* issue "Women's Rights, Human Rights," 1,500 copies of which were circulated at the Beijing Conference, Sunila Abeyesekera cautions:

> The emergence of various forms of cultural relativism linked to religious fundamentalisms and national chauvinisms that contain a range of negative formulations of "woman" has made it more imperative than ever before for women to support the principle of universality set out in international human rights standards. (7)

Robin Morgan, Mahnaz Afkhami and other members of the *Sisterhood Is Global Institute* rose valiantly to the challenge by writing "A Woman's Creed," reproduced in an article by Linda Christiansen-Ruffman published in the "Post-Beijing" issue of *CWS/cf.*[79] This is a poem that rearticulates the universality of women's rights and the primacy of gender unity over class or cultural differences.

In her article, Christiansen-Ruffman laments the fact that "[t]he platform for

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[79] *Sisterhood Is Global Institute* (SIGI) is an international feminist organization founded by Robin Morgan after the publication of her 1984 anthology by the same name. On 1 January 2000, SIGI moved its headquarters from Bethesda, Maryland and the presidency of former Secretary General of the WOI, Mahnaz Afkhami, to Montreal, Canada under the direction of its new president, Greta Hoffman Nemiroff.

Action sanctioned in Beijing did not express a new analysis or vision such as that contained within A Woman's Creed" (38). Despite her belief in the "newness" of its vision, this document reproduces the romanticized language of 1970s global sisters who saw all women united in resistance to universal Patriarchy. That this feminist document should be called a "creed" is doubly ironic, as the term suggests uncritical, catechistic learning and evokes the doctrinal Christianity of colonial missionaries. It is worth quoting here at length:

> We are female human beings poised on the edge of the new millennium. We are the majority of our species, yet we have dwelt in the shadows. We are the invisible, the illiterate, the labourers, the refugees, the poor. And we vow: *No more*. We are the women who hunger – for rice, home, freedom, each other ourselves. We are the women who thirst – for clean water and laughter, literacy, love . . . For we are the Old Ones, the New Breed, the Natives who came first but lasted, indigenous to an utterly different dimension. We are the girl child in Zambia, the grandmother in Burma, the women in El Salvador and Afghanistan, Finland, and Fiji . . . Bread. A clean sky. Active peace. A woman's voice singing somewhere, melody drifting like smoke for the cookfires. . . A humble, earthy paradise, in the now. We *will* make it real, make it our own, make policy, history, peace, make it available, make mischief, a difference, love the connections, the miracle, ready. ***Believe it. We are the women who will transform the world.*** (Emphasis theirs)

The language of the Creed presents a totalizing vision of what it means to be a woman and a feminist. It is formulated as a creed, which implies that the document is an article of faith demanding a dogmatic adherence; those who do not believe the creed cannot be good feminists. The result is a rhetorical position that automatically precludes the possibility of disagreement or dissent, lest you be identified with, in Morgan's words, "Big Brothers of all kinds [who] emphasize the differences" (1984: 19).

In the tradition of the 1970s, the Creed foregrounds gender as the essential similarity that overrides all differences. The discourse of universality enables privileged women located in the West to align themselves with and speak for the aboriginals in North America, the girl child in Zambia and the grandmother in Burma, thus occluding the colonial history of the very discourse they employ. Indeed, the authors of the Creed, in solidarity with their transnational sisters, participate in the amnesiac global feminist project by repackaging the colonial discourse of sisterhood under the ostensibly "new vision" of "strategic" sisterhood.

A recent example of the myopia of international feminists and their complicity in eliding Iranian women's agency is demonstrated by the fracas at the Asian Preparatory Meeting for the *World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance* held in February 2001 in Tehran. A group of women attending the conference removed their headscarves in flagrant violation of the country's laws about women's *hejab*. Ginger Da Silva of Radio Netherlands reported:

> At a recent NGO Forum in Tehran, several foreign women removed their headscarves. They made a public protest and issued a declarationobjecting

> to the oppression of their 'Iranian sisters.' Their Iranian sisters were not impressed. (1)

Unsurprisingly, Iranian women were disturbed by the actions of their international sisters, particularly in light of the current volatile political situation in Iran. Since President Mohammad Khatami's 1997 electoral victory, there has been intensified competition for state power between the two government factions of the "reformers" (supporters of Khatami) and the "hardliners" (supporters of religious leader Ali Khamenei). The "hardliners" seized the unveiling incident as an opportunity to denounce the conference, and the reformers' support of establishing friendly relations with non-Islamic nations; most importantly, however, this incident carries echoes of the 1979 revolutionary moment when interference by Western feminists forestalled an indigenous Iranian feminist movement. Iranian newspapers aligned with the hardliners published photographs of the unveiled women, "and thereafter referred to the conference as a convention of 'women without hejab' and a move against the Islamic requirement" (IRNA 2 Feb 2001). As in 1979, Iranian women were faced with the impossible dichotomy of choosing between a perceived Western feminism and an allegiance to the state. They "chose," therefore, to issue public statements distancing themelves from the actions of their international sisters:

> "As an Iranian woman, I feel insulted," says Vahide Dindaré, "I feel it's not good behaviour to insult your host. We have been very hospitable to them and we have given them the opportunity, we have only asked them to cover their heads, and it is not a heavy hejab on them, but they protested

> very strongly against it in a formal way. *They could have talked with us about it, about the issue informal and I'm sure we could have come to a conclusion about the matter.*" (Da Silva 1, emphasis mine)

This comment illustrates how once again, the benevolent act of sisterhood is carried out without any consultation with the objects of sisterly compassion.

In response to the angry outbursts by both Iranian men and women regarding the unveiling debacle, the officials of the *Asian Preparatory Meeting* issued a statement "express[ing] deep sorrow over the problems caused by a number of participants, who *unknowingly defied the laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, thus insulting the sentiments of the Iranian community" (IRNA 22 Feb 2001, emphasis mine). Needless to say, the excuse about their ignorance of the nation's laws is a specious one, particularly in light of comments made by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, who told a news conference that she had been made aware of Iran's dress code laws before the conference began, and had passed this information along to the women conference participants (Reuters 23 February 2001). According to a report by Agence France-Presse:

> [the women delegates] said their protest "is in no way aimed at the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran." "However, we wish to clarify that many of us come from countries and societies in which women have struggled for recognition of their human rights on principles of equality (. . .), [sic] including the right to make decisions regarding every aspect of their lives." (1)

This forced apology reinscribes the familiar images of veiled Iranian woman mobilized by missionary women and early feminists who bemoaned the lamentably slow evolutionary development of their Persian sisters. The statement implies that the women who staged the public unveiling are not at fault; unlike Iranian women, they are simply accustomed to fighting for their rights. It is simultaneously disheartening and infuriating that this galling statement was issued in the year 2001; it elides the active resistance of Iranian women against male, as well as Western and Pahlavi feminist, supremacy. Despite the attempts of Western and Pahlavi feminists to configure the veil as a site of oppression, indigenous Iranian feminists insist that the discrimination against them under the Islamic Republic encompasses more than just the easy, visible marker of the veil:

> "THE HIJAB is not an issue for us!" insists Venus, a teacher in her early 40s with her hair dyed a deep shade of titian under her navy headscarf. "The divorce laws, custody regulations – it's in these areas that the system is stacked against women in Iran. But the hijab? We don't see it as a symbol of oppression." (Pommert 3 June 2001)

Clearly these are also women fighting for their rights, yet their global sisters appear to have difficulty allowing them to determine, for themselves, what those rights should be.

Iranian women have demonstrated that they are occupied with contesting a number of issues regarding discrimination against women in Iranian society. In May 2001, Farah Khosravi sparked a major controversy by submitting her name for nomination to the list of Presidential candidates for the upcoming elections in June. "If women can elect a president, they should also have the right to be elected," claimed Khosravi, thus launching a debate on the meaning of the word "rejal" in the Iranian constitution (qtd. Reuters 14 May 2001: 1):

> The election law says a candidate must be 'a political or religious figure, of Iranian origin, of the official state religion, faithful to the cause of the Islamic Republic.' The legal term used, rejal, from the Arabic rajol, or eminent person, implies that candidates must be male. (La Guardia 3 May 2001)

Khosravi and her supporters argued that rejal "(in the constitution) is like the English 'man' which can be used to refer to either sexes [sic]" (IRNA 15 May 2001). Shortly after announcing her intention to enter the Presidential candidacy race, Khosravi withdrew her name in order to stem the tide of invective launched against her by the conservative factions of the government. Khosravi's questioning of the constitution and the place of women within the nation was an important achievement, despite the ultimate reversal of her decision.

In this thesis, I have tried to argue that there is an increasingly vocal, and effective, indigenous Iranian feminist movement articulating women's demands for equal recognition under the law. This indigenous Iranian feminism is working directly against the normative, regulatory model of global, universal, or transnational sisterhood. In her analysis of the construction of the categories of gender and sex, Judith Butler has argued that the formation of a subject requires a process of identification with these regulatory and normative categories (3). An effective form of resistance to the normalizing process is through, what she calls, "disidentification:"

> . . . the persistence of disidentification is equally crucial to the

> rearticulation of democratic contestation. Indeed, it may be precisely through practices which underscore disidentification with those regulatory norms by which sexual difference is materialized that both feminist and queer politics are mobilized. (4)

Butler's model has correlatives in other theoretical frameworks. For example, Louis Althusser's model of ideological interpellation requires the subject's identification with the moment of "hailing" in order to subject her into ideology.[80] Butler's model of "disidentification," then, is structurally similar to what could be referred to as a process of Althusserian "disinterpellation." Contemporary Iranian feminists are, I believe, contesting the normative category of "woman" as disseminated through the persisting discourses of global sisterhood and transnational feminism by actively disidentifiying with, or disinterpellating themselves from, its regulatory discourses.

By tracing the intersections of the discourses of global sisterhood and modernity and their repercussions in the context of late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Iran, my aim has been, to borrow the words of David Scott, to enable "a strategic practice of criticism" which he sees as "concerned more with reading the present with a view to determining whether (and how) to continue with it in the future" (7). Although Scott's analysis focuses on the future of the field of postcolonial studies, I believe that his concerns about a strategic practice of criticism can be usefully applied to this context. He writes:

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[80] See "Ideology and Idelogical State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)." *Mapping Ideology*. Ed. Slavoj Zizek. London: Verso, 1994. 100-140.

> . . . a strategic practice of criticism will ask whether the moment of normalization of a paradigm is not also the moment when it is necessary to reconstruct and reinterrogate the ground of questions themselves through which it was brought into being in the first place; to ask whether the critical *yield* of the normal problem-space continues to be what it was when it first emerged; and if not, to ask what set of questions is emerging in the new problem-space that might reconfigure and so expand the conceptual terrain in which an object is located. (8-9, emphasis his)

Indeed, although global sisterhood has been taken to task by feminists, particularly women of colour, since the 1980s, it has been replaced by transnational feminism, which is, I argue, largely a reproduction of global feminism. Thus the "normalization of [the] paradigm" of sisterhood requires a persistent and continuous critique by feminists who do not subscribe to its regulatory practices.

An important question for feminist scholars, "whether the critical *yield* of the normal problem-space continues to be what it was when it first emerged," has been debated by Susan Gubar and Robyn Wiegman in the pages of *Critical Inquiry* (in issues 24.4 and 25.2, Summer 1998 and Winter 1999). Gubar published an article entitled, "What ails Feminist Criticism?" which Wiegman critiqued in her response, "What ails Feminist Criticism? A Second Opinion." The same issue included Gubar's rebuttal in which she chastises Wiegman for being a bad feminist subject and betraying the sisterhood, or more appropriately, the mother/daughter relationship that had nurtured Wiegman's intellectual growth: "Robyn Wiegman (whom I simply cannot call Wiegman, as if I haven't personally observed and applauded her professional success over the past upteen years [. . .]" (Gubar 385). Gubar's disappointment at Wiegman for straying from the true feminist fold is evident here.

Although she seems to be unaware of the politics in which she is engaging, Gubar is decidedly rapping Wiegman across the knuckles, reminding her of the loyalty she owes. Other feminists such as Sandra Gilbert and Carolyn Heilbrun rallied around Gubar, submitting letters expressing their horror at Wiegman's article and her lack of sisterly solidarity. This heated exchange, and its aftermath, is yet another indication of the hegemonic feminist desire to enforce the disciplinary, normalizing discourse of sisterhood.

Alternative models to sisterhood, however, are becoming increasingly visible in the Iranian context, particularly through the medium of contemporary Iranian cinema. Chapter Four has focused primarily on the agency of Iranian women and their construction of specific, indigenous models that draw on the strength imparted through homosocial female bonding. While I have used Eve Sedgwick's concept of homosocial desire to formulate my own position, I have also drawn on Afsaneh Najmabadi's discussion of female homosocial relations in "pre-modern" Persia. This model of homosocial bonding, I argue, moves us a step closer towards discarding the oppressive model of sisterhood. It draws on the potentiality of collective will as a vehicle to enable the "radica[l] change [of one's] subjectivity (Foucault in Kritzman 218).

Indigenous Iranian feminists are on the threshold of a radically revisioned paradigm of Iranian gender relations. The possibilities for substantial change have been enabled through the efforts of feminists who are currently at work, and under attack, in contemporary Iran. At the time of writing, it remains unclear what will be the repercussions of their feminist demands at a point when the political future of Iran hangs in the balance. Nevertheless, what does remain clear is that the continuing efforts of visible and articulate Iranian women under the Islamic Republic work in direct opposition to global/transnational feminists' figuration of Persian women as abject, and against Iranian (patriarchal) cultural representations of women in subsidiary roles as daughters, wives, and mothers. This dissertation began with Freya Stark's romantic representation of a fairy tale Persia; I think it is, therefore, fitting to close with the words of a contemporary, active, and outspoken Iranian feminist, Shahla Lahiji:

> The Iranian woman has been, and is a partner, the equal and the collaborator of the Iranian man. Her presence is a creative one – whether in carrying out social duties or the specific roles assigned to her, as a capable manager or mother whose incisive and organized approach to life represent[s] her special abilities. If we neglect these facts, we are guilty of neglecting the whole truth. (7)

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